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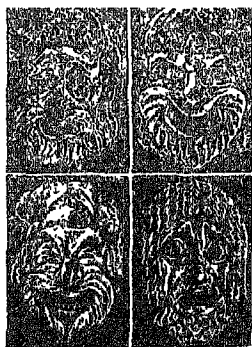


OF IRONY  
Especially in Drama



# OF IRONY

## Especially in Drama



By G. G. Sedgewick

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## THE ALEXANDER LECTURES

*The Alexander Lectureship was founded in honour of Professor W. J. Alexander, who held the Chair of English at University College from 1889 to 1926. Each year the Lectureship brings to the University a distinguished scholar or critic to give a course of lectures on a subject related to English Literature.*





THE lectures, of which this book is made up, were given under the patronage of the Alexander Foundation, at the University of Toronto, in February, 1934. Except for verbal revisions and a few minor changes, they are printed as they were delivered, with all their imperfections on their head: an attempt to make a real book out of them proved fatal to the temper in which they were composed and given. Whatever the value of that temper may be, these are at worst the Alexander Lectures of 1934. Readers (in the event of there being any) who reasonably object to pedagogical diffuseness and iteration, are hereby warned to "chese another tale."

The subject of Irony has interested me ever since I read R. G. Moulton's books on Shakespeare over thirty years ago. Some results of the interest were embodied in a dissertation long since decently interred in the Harvard Library. No trumpet has been heard summoning those dry bones to resurrection, but I have taken liberty to rifle the tomb and recover some portions of skeleton for the bony structure of the first two lectures. The third and fourth lectures are now being buried for the first time.

Many acknowledgments of debt were made years ago and cannot be now repeated. For the first lecture I have drawn heavily upon two superb and still largely unshaken essays of Otto Ribbeck published in 1876 and 1882 respectively: "Ueber den Begriff des *εἰρων*," and the companion study of the *ἀλαζών*. And to the main suggestions about dramatic irony that were made by Moulton I have not added much. Both of these men, by the way, if

they are not too far distant from humanity, hear themselves spoken of disrespectfully nowadays, but mostly by persons who might well be lacing shoes. What I have said about German Romanticism has been taken from more sources than I can enumerate: a sufficient number of these, I hope, are indicated in the text or the notes.

I am grateful to Professor B. H. Lehman of the University of California and to several of my colleagues, particularly to Professors Isabel MacInnes and O. J. Todd, who have helped me a great deal with the references to German and Greek. To Professor W. J. Alexander I would say that I am sorry the performance is not more worthy of his name. To him, to Principal Malcolm Wallace, President Cody and the authorities of the University of Toronto, and many friends there, I owe much for gracious hospitality and the incredible kindly patience with which they listened to these lectures. And the memory of help given, more amply than he knew, by Professor W. A. Neilson, now President of Smith College, is still gratefully alive.

G. G. SEDGEWICK

*The University of British Columbia*  
*February 3, 1935*

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The University of Toronto Press has generously undertaken this new edition of my Alexander Lectures. Little change has been made in the text, the very few revisions being verbal and quite unimportant. The substance of the first lecture remains as tentative as it was twelve years ago: I hope that someone will be able, some day, to tell the whole story of Irony with final authority. Within their limits, the last three lectures still appear to me valid enough.

G. G. S.

*The University of British Columbia*  
*June 11, 1947*



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# I



## The Meanings and History of IRONY





IT MAY LOOK like small courtesy to this distinguished Foundation to discuss, under its protection, a mere word that everyone apparently knows only too well. The late H. W. Fowler, of *Modern English Usage*, would enter "irony of fate" on the "retired list of clichés," and his proposal is to be applauded. On a well-known page of a Hemingway novel, a young sophisticate makes "irony and pity" the sport of contemptuous (and maudlin) mirth. And Mr. Haakon Chevalier, after quoting from the page, eloquently argues that irony is "the product of certain radical insufficiencies of character and a mode of escape from the fundamental problems and responsibilities of life"; it prevents an artist, he says, "from achieving an altogether satisfying aesthetic synthesis"—it is a "flight from reality." All this sounds rather ominous. Just now I have no reply, but I should like to suggest that two other phrases are dead ripe for retirement: namely, "satisfying synthesis" and "escape from reality."

Well, Fowler no doubt knew that "irony of fate" was a typically Romantic term, and in retiring it he knew he was announcing the old news that Romanticism of the nineteenth-century kind is worn out. And Mr. Chevalier is aware that to deride irony is to announce the passing of the vogue of Anatole France. A term that stands for two such vogues may at least claim a certain historical importance. As for "reality" and "the fundamental responsibilities of life," I propose, in due ironic fashion, to escape them and deal with a world of illusion; for the theatre, whatever may be its social significance, is a mode of illu-

#### 4 OF IRONY, ESPECIALLY IN DRAMA

sion. In the lectures that follow I am going to discuss what irony means in drama. But today I ask you to listen, with what patience you can muster, to a hasty account of how the word managed to get into drama at all. I beg you to remember that the whole story is complicated and that a brief summary of it is bound to be guilty of all the falsities of foreshortening. Besides, even if your patience and my allotted time had no limits, I could not tell the whole tale because I do not know it. All I can do is to moderate the impulse to guess, and tell you when it is being indulged. Finally, you may resent my abandonment of chronological order in the early stages of the discussion. But a choice had to be made between chronology and due stress upon the meanings of irony that are still alive.

With very good reason indeed, Otto Ribbeck closed his great essay on the "ironist" in Greek literature by saying that the word was *proteusartig*—that it changed shape as readily as the Old Man of the Sea. In modern English the problem of irony itself is even more complex. For with this word there has been little sloughing of old meanings in the growth of new ones; speech apparently finds continuing use for most of them. This confusing variety of shape, particularly in its modern aspects, we shall now proceed to examine.

Probably we first meet the term in a text-book of rhetoric along with its Greek friends, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole. The schoolboy is told, in the words of the *New English Dictionary*, that it is a figure of speech "in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed in the word used"; and he discovers that, when he sneers at an enemy—"you are a pretty fellow" (if ever schoolboys are as polite as Macaulay's drayman!)—he has been uttering "irony," which is "one of the four primary tropes."

The quaint words of the earliest example in the *N.E.D.*, quoted as of 1502, put the case more vigorously: they speak of the irony "of grammare, by the whyche a man sayth one and gyveth to understande the contrarye." This definition is at least as old as the Hellenistic rhetoricians: irony, says a rather unconventional specimen of the tribe, signifies one "contrarye" by means of another (τὸ διὰ τοῦ ἐναντίου τὸ ἐναντίον σημαίνειν). A terse formula of Cicero runs something like *aliud dicere ac sentias*—saying one thing and meaning another. Of course the trope itself (not the word) must really be as old as coherent speech. Long before history began, its methods became instinctive in the race: to blame by seeming to praise, to praise by seeming to blame, says Quintilian—*laudis adsimulatione detrudere et vituperationis laudare*—leaving the truth to be understood from tone, gesture, or known circumstance. It is the most powerful weapon of the orator, nearly the whole panoply of the satirist. Its invariable effect is that of mockery, ranging from affectionate banter to "drye mocke" (the quaint phrase of Elizabethan Puttenham); and it tends mainly to the latter. As said Bishop Thirlwall, first importer into English of another irony, "It is a weapon properly belonging to the armoury of controversy, and not fitted to any peaceable occasion," though he granted that "the enginery of war is often brought out and sham fights exhibited for the public amusement in times of peace." But of the history and nature of this particular figure we have said enough. In essence it is a pretence—προσποίησις, *dissimulatio*, *simulatio*—the purpose of which is mockery or deception of one sort or another; and its force derives from one of the keenest and oldest and least transient pleasures of the reflective human mind—the pleasure in contrasting Appearance with Reality.

The proper signification of the words constitutes the appearance; the designed meaning is the reality.

As I have said, this irony "of grammare" is probably the first form of irony which we encounter. Remember, it is not the oldest form. In fact it appears to be a third or fourth stage of development, according as you reckon the stages. *Eironeia*, as the Periclean Greeks conceived it, was not so much a mode of speech as *a general mode of behaviour*. But, very probably before Aristotle and certainly not so very long after him, the term got definitely attached to that deceptive use of *words* which we all know. Although other meanings preceded, or persisted, or evolved, this sense of irony as a verbal figure has held the dominant place, usually the only place, in the text-books and word-lists and dictionaries of two thousand years. In common speech, probably, it is still the fundamental form of the idea.

We shall now pause for just a moment over an ancient flirtation between rhetorical irony and allegory. You may, if you wish, define the two in exactly the same words, as a good many early rhetoricians did. And it is obvious that the effect of much allegory is ironic. You may follow this identification through the refinements of Quintilian, the pleasant biblical illustrations of Venerable Bede, and occasional later commentators down to a tendency in the German Romantics to equate Irony and Symbolism. There seems to be an instance of this equation in William Archer's essay on *The Wild Duck*. But it need not detain us longer.

Another shape of irony—that of Litotes or Understatement—has for us a more abundant, if somewhat cloistered, life. "Saying less than one thinks or means" is given, or

rather used to be given, in some dictionaries as the ultimate etymological sense of irony. Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary*, under date of 1882, gives such a derivation. And the *Century Dictionary and Encyclopedia* of 1911, glosses *eiron*, the ironist, as the dissembler, literally "one who talks (but who says less or more than he means)," as if the word came from *eirein*, to say or speak. (A derivation now commonly accepted is from the Ionic *ἔρομαι*, to ask, or more definitely, to ask questions.) Socrates, of course, was an "understater," although his contemporaries did not so interpret *eiron*. In fact, it was Aristotle who first made the precise formulation of irony as "a pretence tending toward the under-side" of the truth (*προσποίησις ἐπὶ τὸ ἑλαττον*). He very sharply defines *eironeia* in that way in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, setting it off against *alazoneia* which is "a pretence tending toward exaggeration" (*προσποίησις ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον*). This distinction is a part of his discussion of the Mean: Truth, he says, lies between these two opposites; "the Middle Man is, in a general way, the truthful man, and the Mean is the Truth." Let me repeat, it is important, at least historically, to remember that, although the notion of irony as understatement—a mere rhetorical figure—derives from Aristotle, it was not the centre of his idea of *eironeia*. In the *Ethics*, *eironeia* is a pervasive mode of behaviour, a constant pretence of self-depression—of which understatement is only one manifestation. We shall revert to this later.

But the actual trick of understatement, by whatever name it might go, was a form of speech to which the Greek mind, hating excess as it did, naturally tended. And so, for that matter, did and does the mind of the primitive

savage. It was a favourite and most effective stylistic device of Anglo-Saxon poetry:

*duru sona onarn  
fyrbendum faest, syððan he hire folmum hran*

—"the door at once stood open, made fast though it was with fire-forged bands, *when he touched it with his fists.*" This is the grim humour which describes Grendel's entry into Heorot Hall. In like spirit, Guthlac's disciple expresses the tribal passion of grief for a dead master:

*huru ic swiðe ne þearf  
hinstið behlehhan*

—"in truth I *had no great need to laugh* at his going-hence." In the hands of Milton, the thing became a trumpet:

Into this wild Abyss the wary Fiend  
Stood on the brink of Hell and looked a while,  
Pondering his voyage; *for no narrow frith*  
He had to cross.

And, to make a sudden descent from epic, I had a nice, warmly contemporary, example supplied to me four days ago by a commercial traveller in the smoking compartment: "Yes," said he in a most matter-of-fact way, "there's old Mount Robson; he's still in the same place." Such figures as these, students of literature (of the last two generations certainly) have been accustomed to describe as irony.

I imagine that the word has been associated with understatement for a very long time, but I have not found any conscious examples of the association occurring in English print or speech until the late nineteenth century. And all the examples I know may be called academic. A

classic, but even later, instance occurs in a charming essay by Arthur Sidgwick, "On Some Forms of Irony," published in the *Cornhill* of 1907. As might be expected, Sidgwick takes a direct cue from Bishop Thirlwall, and then passes over the bishop's head to draw on Socrates and Aristotle. Strangely enough, he takes for granted, throughout, that the *usual meaning* of irony is conscious inadequacy of speech. I can quote only a sentence or two:

If we attempt to use only the language which appears to be adequate, we overshoot the mark. . . . We give the idea not of a really deep and sustained feeling, but of a paroxysm, a momentary fury, an extravagance. . . . As in the vision of Elijah, the sign of an Almighty Presence is the still small voice; and so it is with human spirits, in their degree. . . . Thus it often comes about that while the lower stages of feeling can be expressed, the higher stages must be suggested. In the ascent the full truth will do; but the climax can only be reached by irony.

Understatement, said Sidgwick in effect, is the "true nature" of irony. Whether he was right or not, is irrelevant just now; the point is that the sense he put upon the word is alive, or was lately alive, in English.

And, after all, his irony is one piece with the commonly understood kind: such understatement is really "saying one and gyving to understande the contrarye." For the thing as stated, the Appearance, falls so far short of the thing itself, the Reality, as to be for all practical purposes a different entity: it is, so to speak, language mocking itself.

Imagine understatement expanded into the principle of a whole life and you have grasped, in the large, a notion of the most famous and noble of all the ironies—the irony of Socrates. The raw material which was shaped into this notion is of course found in Plato. But the first shaping was done by the same book to which we traced



the irony of litotes: the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Historically, Socratic irony is the most important of all the ironic forms: for on the one hand it brings us close to the earliest extant uses of the word in Greek, and on the other it is the matrix of all the ironies which the romantics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries developed. The best short description of it is not in Aristotle, however, but in Quintilian speaking under obvious Aristotelian influence: "In the figure," he says, "which involves the whole active intention, there is a fiction implicit rather than acknowledged, . . . when literally a life in all its manifestations seems to possess irony, as was the case with Socrates. For on this account he was called *eiiron*—because he pretended to be an inexperienced person and to wonder at others as if they were wise." Quintilian's discussion of the subject as a whole is most suggestive and important, and it has been very little studied. But I cannot linger over it except to point out that the passage quoted anticipates the German romantics and gives Thirlwall a theme for chaste expansion: the "dialectic irony" of Socrates, wrote the bishop, is "not concentrated in insulated passages" but is "spread over the whole like a transparent vesture closely fitted to every limb of the body."

I must risk your irritation by repeating that the word *eironeia* which the Athenians applied to the dialectic method of Socrates did not mean, to them, all the fine things that it means to us. Socrates was, indeed, the *eiiron*; and his peculiar habit, "that notorious and habitual Irony of Socrates." But to his contemporaries, friend and foe alike, the word *eiiron* carried some sense like "sly deceiver," "sly mocker," "hypocritical rascal." *Eironeia* was *not*, as a modern Romantic insists it was, "to the Greek an incomparable method of intercourse, the rub of mind

against mind by the simple use of simulated ignorance"; nor was it anything so dignified. I have just quoted the first extant use of the fully grown nominative *eironeia*, and in its famous context in the *Republic*, it is exactly what Ribbeck points out it always was in Greek literature down to Aristotle—a term of abuse. It is flung in Socrates' face by the rude and angry Thrasymachus, whom Socrates has trapped in argument, and at the very best it means "mocking pretence"; "leg-pulling" is vulgar enough but too jocosely mild, "sly-foxery," if there were such a pretty word, would give part of the meaning but not all; I think there was in it a tinge of "low-bred." Invariably, in early Greek literature, *iron* is found in bad company: Ribbeck says he was a person as "elastic as rubber and as slippery as oil." The three appearances of the word (or its derivatives) in Aristophanes are not reassuring; not one of Plato's thirteen or fourteen uses has an association quite reputable; it is quite unsavoury in Theophrastus; nor, in later days, is it likely to fare altogether well in Lucian and Plutarch. But, for our purposes at the moment, the notable thing is this: *in the majority of the cases just referred to, EIRON and EIRONEIA are not far from the neighbourhood of Socrates.*

At this point Aristotle speaks with his "notorious and habitual" importance. For our ideas of Socratic irony spring ultimately from Aristotle's definition of *eironeia* as a pretence which takes the form of self-depression. It is practically certain, as Ribbeck points out, that he was led to this definition by the dignity which Socrates had injected into a term of abuse, a *Schimpfwort*: that is, *ironcia* came to mean "pretended modesty" (and understatement as well) because Socrates' irony obviously took that form. At any rate, Aristotle not only suggested to a

far later time the equating of irony and litotes, but he also fixed the general sense of Socratic irony for all time. Although he points out that truth lies in the Mean betwixt *eironeia* and *alazoneia*, with the inference that neither is the ideal habit of behaviour, he has some carefully guarded praise for the *eirons*: such persons, he grants, "appear better-bred than the *alazons*, for they do not seem to speak for gainful ends but as if they were avoiding display; and they make a special point of disclaiming even what is held in esteem, as indeed Socrates did."

As far as I know, the chorus of unreserved praise for Socratic irony was led off by Cicero. "Urbane pretence" is his word for it; and he says further, "I think that Socrates in this irony and pretence of his far surpassed everyone else in the way of humane grace." Around this theme, during the ages since Cicero, has grown up a vast literature. We have come to use "Socratic irony" to describe the Attic philosopher's way of exposing falsehood and of getting at the truth. For his irony was double. There was no way of exposing those puffed-up Sophists but to pin them down to rigid definitions of opinion. Allow them to talk at large, and their practised eloquence would forever conceal their emptiness. So, aided by a Silenus-like vacuity of expression, Socrates would confront Gorgias and his kind with a reasonable request to have plain answers suited to his own ignorance and stupidity. But this reasonable *dissimulatio* was really also "a logical masked battery." A few absolutely plain answers lured the arrogant humbug either into self-contradiction or silence, or even into a confession of ignorance. There was, too, a positive side to the ironic method of this wisest man in Greece. Some of his disciples were genuinely desirous of truth, and Socrates was equally desirous of helping them

and himself to find it. He, of course, was wiser than they: had not the oracle said it? But perhaps at the core of their confusion, behind their inarticulateness, lay some kernel of truth that he and they might find by searching. Each of their discussions became an adventure in quest of a pearl of price. With the sympathy of a teacher who feels himself perfectly articulate he depressed his own wisdom, and coming down in playful earnest to their level of ignorance, he would teach them to express their real meanings, dissipating a cloud of vagueness here and puncturing a logical fallacy there. Thus he was, as he said, a midwife to their intelligence. These are the things that we have come to mean by Socratic irony. Our ideas of it are the sum of twenty-three centuries of addition that have transformed the Periclean Athenian's concept of the term into something different in kind. The core of understatement put into it by Socrates and Aristotle remains; but all offensiveness has disappeared, and even the mockery which it connotes has become for us just an incident in that "urbane dissimulation" that was not merely "of the Socratic method but of the Socratic life." It is a war upon Appearance waged by a man who knows Reality: now it is a process deadly to empty pretence, now a sort of kindly pruning vital to growth in truth.

We wearily arrive at the final stages of our survey. For I am confident that Socratic irony contains the germs of all the newer ironies which have so afflicted the literature of the last century. One of the commonest of these is the irony of Detachment or Spiritual Freedom. By this we mean the attitude of mind held by a philosophic observer when he abstracts himself from the contradictions of life and views them all impartially, himself perhaps included in the ironic vision. Lucretius and Bacon knew the de-

lights of this detachment, though they did not call it irony: "*no pleasure is comparable*," they tell us, "*to the standing upon the vantage ground of truth (a hill not to be commanded, and where the air is always clear and serene), and to see errors, and wanderings, and mists, and tempests in the vale below*"; "so always," Bacon adds with characteristic caution, "that this prospect be with pity and not with swelling or pride." Unfortunately, most "detached ironists" have not heeded Bacon's warning. And there is no mathematical "proof" that the sense of spiritual freedom came into the word irony from their cult of Socrates. But it has no other origin nearly so probable, for the philosopher's free play of mind upon everything presented to it, as described above, would readily suggest that the name of his famous method be applied to his state of spiritual emancipation. And there is positive evidence that at least one "ironist" who thought himself spiritually free derived his idea of irony from Socrates. I quote a famous passage from Friedrich Schlegel—a passage which its author must have admired, since he uses it twice:

Socratic Irony is a unique form of conscious dissimulation. It is equally impossible to imitate it or to make it clear. For him who has it not, it will remain, according to his own obvious confession, a riddle. It is not meant to deceive anyone, except those who consider it a deception and who either rejoice in the splendid sport of making fun of everybody or else get angry when they suspect that they also are the objects of the sport. In it is to be included all jest, all earnest, everything transparently open and everything deeply concealed. It springs from a union of the feeling for life as an art with the scientific spirit, from the conjunction of a complete nature-philosophy and a complete philosophy of art. It embodies and arouses a sense of the insoluble conflict between the finite and the absolute, between the impossibility and yet the necessity of a complete communication [as between the two?]. It is the freest of all

licences, for through it one is enabled to rise above himself; and yet it is the most lawful, for it is absolute necessity. It is a very good sign if smug commonplace people do not know how they are to regard this constant self-parody of taking jest for earnest and earnest for jest.

Even Socrates would have been astonished at such an interpretation of himself, and in our own day Irving Babbitt has been horrified. Here is freedom with a vengeance—"the freest of all licences"!

The source of the quotation, the famous catchwords in it, and its confused welter of ideas remind us that we are in the presence of a really truly Old Man of the Sea, born in Germany some time in the very late eighteenth century—"the notorious Romantic Irony." My knowledge of this curious thing is largely second-hand and it has not been "brought up to date." But you will have some difficulty, I think, in getting information that is at once clear and complete even from those who know. Professor Babbitt's account in *Rousseau and Romanticism* is the most authoritative that I know in English, but it is rather too obviously hostile. The romanticists themselves juggle with irony until the word loses meaning; they seem to vary the sense they put upon it, according as their humours and conceits may govern. It is exciting, for instance, to see "dramatic irony"—the very phrase—on a page of Friedrich Schlegel, who says it occurs when a poet, having written three acts of a play, suddenly "becomes another man" and then has to finish the performance. A case, I should suppose, not so much of irony as of tough luck. But no doubt this is only an instance of that *transzendente Buffonerie* which was one of Schlegel's many endearing names for irony. Other documentary evidence calls it *Selbstparodie*, "joy in the possession of an infinite

mind," or "the recognition that finite works are only . . . symbols." But to most serious discussions of this irony known to me, whether in the romanticists themselves or in their historians, is common in some form the idea of *spiritual freedom of view*: "Romantic Irony enables men to sweep free and unfettered over circumstance."

Two remarks of Goethe will illustrate this notion. Goethe, I suppose, belongs neither to the romantic nor to any other category; but he too looked upon irony—*gewagtes Wort*, he called it—as *die hohe Lebensansicht*, recalling at once those two arch-ironists, Lucretius and Bacon. And again, with the aid of a captivating image, he suggests irony as a name for the power of viewing our own lives and even that nature within us which we cannot change:

If we do not indulge in the common habit of unloading our errors on circumstance or on other people, there will at last arise, from the clash of a reasonable directing consciousness with that nature which though modifiable cannot be changed, a kind of Irony within and with ourselves whereby we treat our faults and errors in a playful spirit—as if they were naughty children who would perhaps not be so dear to us, were they not afflicted with such naughtiness.

I hasten to say that I hold no brief for the Olympian morals of this utterance. And lest there should be some question about the "romanticism" of Goethe, I quote from Tieck, of whose category there can be no doubt. Speaking of the artist's irony, he calls it "the earnest and the highest proof of true inspiration, of that Etherspirit which, while it saturates its work with love, yet sweeps rejoicing and unfettered over the whole." To the romantics, you will notice, sympathy and detachment are not mutually exclusive terms.

Tieck's rhapsody, I point out in passing, brings irony

near to the borders of drama; in fact he probably had drama in mind when he made it. He and his kind never seem to tire of calling Shakespeare an ironist: "The whole thing is ironic," he says, speaking of a Shakespearian play, "and so it is everywhere in Shakespeare, take him where you will. This is what makes his characters visible and palpable so that they are real human beings." The dramatist's prototype, says Solger, the romantic philosopher who influenced Tieck, is the Creative Spirit:

Life and each moment thereof becomes perfectly complete and rounded to a happy fulness while I grasp it in its immediate actuality by means of dramatic art—just as the essence of God, in its non-actuality, reveals itself intact as the very core of my own nature. My friends, must not the true and perfect art be this—the art which is exercised by the mind of God operating as actual and living, and the works of which we with our human mind assemble only as the *dissecta membra* of the Artist? And it is this godlike mind which produces the like effect in us and teaches us to sense fully, in the traffic of our temporal artists, our true nature as it is indeed and in itself. So we may say briefly that our present and actual nature known and experienced in its essential reality is Art; and that in art everywhere exists that Centre wherein essence and actuality coalesce as an immediate present—namely, Irony, the consummate fruit of the artistic mind.

But probably Solger's doctrine will be clearer in a scholar's summary: "Supreme Irony reigns in the conduct of God as he creates men and the life of men. In earthly art Irony has this meaning—conduct similar to God's: it is the Divine-Human [power] that turns the poet's creations into real Men and their behaviour into real Life."

Examples of the general romantic use of the word are all too easy to find in later literature. Webster states that irony "often implies an attitude of unemotional detachment," and quotes Mrs. Humphry Ward as speaking of "the irony that sets men free." And an essay of R. S. Bourne, which made some stir twenty years ago, furnishes an



example of unusual interest. "The Life of Irony," as it is called, credits its direct inspiration to Socrates; and so, if its author really was not moved by influences from German literature, it illustrates remarkably just how romantic irony may have come into being, for it reads like the very stuff of German romanticism. "Nothing," says Bourne, "seems to him [the ironist] too sacred to touch, nothing too holy for him to become witty about." "Socratic irony," wrote Schlegel, "is wont to interweave the holiest with the ludicrous and the negligible." "His free and easy manner"—Bourne again—"of including everything within the sweep of his vision, is but his recognition . . . of the fact that nothing is really so serious as we think it is, and nothing quite so petty." This might be an echo of Solger and Schlegel: "So also the spirit of the artist must gather together all rules in one all-pervasive view"; ". . . take jest for earnest and earnest for jest." And there is at least a faint sound of *Selbstparodie* in the later ironist's "more tolerant, half-amused, half-earnest attitude toward himself." Romanticism may be dying, but *die romantische Ironie* seems to have lived on. Even Mr. Hemingway's heroes may despise the word, but they exemplify the thing.

It is high time I related this sense of "unfettered freedom" to the principle I have chanted so often. Like Socratic irony, from which it took its cue, it is not a mere clash of speech with meaning, or of apparent situation with real situation, but the mental attitude of a being, divine or human, who beholds such things: a spiritual freedom viewing contradictions in the spectacle of life before it, and, in the case of the artist, a creative power giving shape to that spectacle.

The conduit through which all these notions and emo-

tions reached English is a famous essay by Bishop Connop Thirlwall, published in 1833, "On the Irony of Sophocles." Thirlwall was a profound student of the German philosophy and theology of his day—one of the first of his kind to be so—and an acquaintance and translator of Tieck. The essay just named is a very important landmark in the history of English dramatic criticism, and indeed a not unimportant event in the history of the language. It either definitely formulated, or else definitely suggested, five applications of our word which, in defect of other records known to me, I believe were then new to English: the ironies of detachment, of fate or circumstance, and three common terms relative to drama—irony "Sophoclean," "tragic," "dramatic." I do not mean, of course, that the *ideas* were new, but the *terms* were. Let us review them in order.

First, the descriptions of the spiritual freedom of the artist, just quoted, are echoed in Thirlwall's words: "The dramatic poet," he says, "is the creator of a little world in which he rules with absolute sway, and [in which he] may sway the destinies of the imaginary beings by any plan that he may choose." Or again: "His view of his work will be that with which he imagines the invisible power who orders the destiny of man might regard the world and its doings." But there is now no reason to stay over Thirlwall's own special brand of romantic dream. It is enough to realize that he credits the dramatist with a detached and freely operating view of his creations and with a sense of control over them; and that to these functions of the artist he gives the name irony.

Nor need much be said about the second of his phrases, which is now to be "retired": the irony of fate or circumstance. It is, of course, "that condition of affairs

opposite to what was . . . expected"; a "mocking discrepancy between appearance and reality." Even dictionaries, from which those words are taken, grow sonorous in this particular Ironic Presence. How pervasive and how profoundly rooted in ancient literature was the *sense* of it (not the *word*, remember), you may learn from the well-known and noble book on *Irony* by Professor J. A. K. Thomson, whose theme is the working of destiny and human perceptions of that working. As for the Goddess Fortuna, and Thomas Hardy's god of neuter gender, they are figures so familiar that a mere mention evokes them. One apposite dramatic image tempts me; it is so very Victorian that it may have recovered freshness for this sophisticated university audience:

... The Master, too;

Whose secret Presence, through Creation's veins  
Running Quicksilver-like eludes your pains;

Taking all shapes from Mah to Mahi; and  
They change and perish all—but He remains;

A moment guess'd—then back behind the Fold  
Immerst of Darkness round the Drama roll'd

Which, for the Pastime of Eternity,  
He doth Himself contrive, enact, behold. . .

We are no other than a moving row  
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go  
Round with the Sun-illuminated Lantern held  
In Midnight by the Master of the Show; . .

Friedrich Schlegel describes "the Master" more brutally as *der grosse Maschinist im Hintergrunde des Ganzen*; and he says further, "it is strikingly ironic that this Power finally discloses himself as a contemptible Betrayer." But this is a far cry from an episcopal view of the "irony of fate."

After the romantics, it was indeed inevitable that the word irony should come to be applied to just such an aspect of the contradiction between "is" and "seems" in the working of destiny and circumstance; for the appearance and reality of word-meanings are precisely parallel to the appearance and reality of events. An interesting passage in a late Greek rhetorician suggests that the word may *possibly* have been related to "fate" and even to drama as early as the thirteenth century. But the modern lexicons give no sound examples of this use down to the nineteenth century; for the *N.E.D.*'s one early illustration, dated 1649, is based on a complete misunderstanding of the passage quoted, and no further instance of "irony of fate" or anything like it is given as between 1639 and Thirlwall's essay in 1833. I believe that Thirlwall suggested it to the language in his phrase "practical irony." After discussing verbal and "dialectic" uses of the word, he passes on to what he calls the practical irony which is "independent of all forms of speech" and exists in life. It may be exhibited, he says, in a malignant shape as "a cherishing of passions and a pandering to wishes which are hurrying their unconscious slave to ruin." Or it may be a wise and benevolent contradiction or reversal, "bitter perhaps, but following of necessity upon man's temerity and shortsightedness . . . . Thus aims fulfilled seem paltry; hopes clash with results . . . . When we review such instances of the mockery of fate, we can scarcely refrain from a melancholy smile. And such we conceive . . . must have been the look which a superior intelligence . . . would at the same time have cast upon the tumultuous workings of our blind ambition." We can imagine that Thirlwall was properly excited at discovering for himself, in Tieck and others, the long-missing word that would cover both

contradiction in events and the sense of that contradiction in an unfettered mind.

With these conceptions Thirlwall came with his word to drama. In doing so he combined "irony of fate" with "ironic detachment": the dramatist's view of his work would be "that with which he imagines the invisible power who orders the destiny of man might regard the world and its doings." This, to Thirlwall, was "tragic irony," and he exhibited it as such in the extant plays of Sophocles.

For our present purpose the three epithets—"Sophoclean," "tragic," "dramatic"—need not be distinguished. All of them derive from Thirlwall's essay, either directly or by process of plain inference; as far as my knowledge goes, no recorded use of these terms as applied to irony antedates 1833. And for nearly a century they have all meant the same thing to most people who utter them, namely, the use in tragedy of two-edged language. But I do not think that Thirlwall really meant to narrow his concept down to such specific detail. The quotations I have drawn from him have a philosophic or even theological cast: irony, he says, like everything else in dramatic poetry, grows out of the poet's "religious or philosophic sentiments"; a tragedian, being a Creator on a small scale, is supposed to act like his prototype; and his irony is the "Divine-Human" in him that exercises wide-sweeping vision and complete control. Whatever the bishop's intentions were, however, the terms he imported into English became firmly attached to ambiguous language almost at once. His essay made as great a stir among English scholars as I have imagined that it made to his own mind. And I suggest that the notion of irony as ambiguous speech in drama caught quick hold because

it involves only an apparently slight (though important) shift from the familiar rhetorical notion—saying one thing and meaning another. At any rate, the new application of the word had become pretty well established by 1871, for in that year Lewis Campbell attacked it as an abuse of language, though admitting that it was common. And as late as 1907, Arthur Sidgwick, crediting Thirlwall with the first use of the phrase in English, could still write as if in doubt about “Dramatic Irony, *as it has been called.*” But Campbell’s objections and Sidgwick’s doubt have not prevailed against usage: many critics, especially in England, still mean “language of double sense” when they speak of irony—whether Sophoclean, or tragic, or dramatic.

To give this meaning some life, as we leave it for the moment, I present a great example—only the particular “Sophoclean” irony I have chosen is from Euripides. And once for all, let me crave indulgence for the tiresome summaries of plot which the nature of this whole discussion makes inevitable.

At the beginning of the *Bacchae*, the god Dionysus comes to Thebes, disguised, to wreak vengeance on King Pentheus who has blasphemed his worship and forbidden it. The women of the city have fled to Mount Cithaeron to celebrate the Bacchic rites—among them Queen Agave, Pentheus’ mother. The god moves the king to offer violence to the divine person and then casts over him the spell of Bacchic madness, so that he insists on going to see the revels; there he is to be torn to pieces, and then his head brought home “in triumph” by his maddened mother. Pentheus boasts of his great strength and of the triumph he is to have, he speaks eagerly, with infatuate impatience, the god in a sort of quiet echoing chant. Note

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how almost every phrase bears a double meaning—one to Pentheus, another to Dionysus and the audience.

PENTHEUS:

Well said. Unmeet to use my mighty strength  
In quelling women! I will hide me in the pines.

DIONYSUS:

You will hide, you will hide—as fate will have you hidden,  
Going in stealth to spy upon the Maenads.

PENTHEUS:

Yes, in the brakes I picture them, like birds  
Caught in the net of love's delightful toil!

DIONYSUS:

Against this very chance you are sent to watch them;  
Perhaps you will snare them—if you escape the snare.

PENTHEUS:

Convoy me through the very heart of Thebes!  
I only am the man to dare all this!

DIONYSUS:

You only, champion of this town, you only!  
Wherefore such toil as should be waits you there.  
Follow! safe conduct I will give by going.  
From thence—another guide!

PENTHEUS:

Ah yes! My mother!

DIONYSUS:

Observed of all men—

PENTHEUS:

That is why I go!

DIONYSUS:

You will return, borne high—

PENTHEUS:

What ease you promise!

DIONYSUS:

In your mother's hands!

PENTHEUS:

To luxury you drive me!

DIONYSUS:

What luxury!

PENTHEUS:

Right worthily I'll bear it!

DIONYSUS:

Marvellous, marvellous you! And marvellous the test  
Awaits you there: your fame will smite the stars.

(*Bacchae*, 953-972)

I will make no comment on the extraordinary power of the passage, which is but dimly and remotely echoed in a mean translation, or on the ambiguity that plays all over it like a sort of magic fire. Such double-edged speech is usually called by the names—all three are still used with complete impartiality—Sophoclean, tragic, dramatic irony.

Professor R. G. Moulton led the concept in its final steps toward the central principle of drama. His books on drama, by the way, are undeservedly reviled or forgotten by the newer criticism; their method may be outmoded, but much of their content is of permanent value. According to him dramatic irony includes "in a general sense the shocks and clashes between one aspect and another of some double situation, the whole grasped by the spectator, only part known to some at least of the personages in the scene." And he makes practically the last advance when, speaking of the irony of intrigue, he says it arises from a conflict of wills—an idea that we shall examine more closely tomorrow. At present let us merely note that the ironies of drama involve a sense of the common basis.

The spectator knows the facts, the people in the play do not. A character's actual situation is one thing, his idea or interpretation of it is another; the promise things have for him is at variance with their outcome—they are not what they seem.



And now a last summing-up. We have noted some seven meanings that are still given to the term: the irony of rhetoric; of allegory; of understatement; of Socratic dialectic; of detachment; of fate or circumstance; and irony "tragic," "Sophoclean," or "dramatic." We have also implied, in passing, that there is an objective and a subjective side to these concepts: first, the clash between appearance and reality in events or language; and second, the *sense* of this clash as felt by a dramatist or a spectator.

These lectures draw most of their examples from the tragedies of Shakespeare and the Greeks. The notion of comic irony will not be discussed, for irony has a clearer edge in tragedy than in comedy. But it would be easy to show that, when the comic sort is analysed, it would appear to be composed of just such elements, external elements at least, as are found in many a tragic situation, and that irony in some form is a practically inevitable result, almost a corollary, of the working of dramatic principle. One remembers an enviable occasion when Socrates succeeded in convincing Aristophanes and Agathon, just before they went under the table, that the genius of tragedy and of comedy was one thing. And Socrates was at least legally sober.

Where next will the idea of irony go? Mr. Chevalier suggests a possible direction: that our *gewagtes Wort* may come (he would say that it had come) to mean an "escape from reality," a spirit alien to a living society and sign of an outworn aristocratic tradition. The irony of Anatole France may be just that. Oddly enough, Mr. Chevalier was anticipated some twenty-two centuries ago by one Demosthenes, who branded shirkers of public duty as *eirons*. I must leave the matter to such other hands as may report on it a generation hence. But I take leave to say

that France's irony is not the only sort, as this survey has remarked with heavy insistence. Some years ago, a Character was written by Lowes Dickinson, who had no thought of irony in mind—a Character, you may be surprised to learn, of a University Man:

It is a type unworldly without being saintly, unambitious without being inactive, warm-hearted without being sentimental. Through good report and ill such men work on, following the light of truth as they see it; able to be sceptical without being paralyzed; content to know what is knowable and to reserve judgment on what is not. The world could never be driven by such men, for the springs of action lie deep in ignorance and madness. But it is they who are the beacon in the tempest, and they are more, not less, needed now than ever before. May their succession never fail!

If I could revise Theophrastus and sketch the type of a Modern Ironical Man, I would steal that passage: it reminds me of Socrates.



## II



## IRONY in Drama



**O**UT of the welter of notions that we have seen tumbling about the word irony, I draw up one for closer examination today—the notion of irony in drama. This, as we saw, is a direct inheritance from the German Romantics reacting probably to a Socratic cue; and consequently it is a very late development in the word's history. In fact, you are celebrating, in these maimed rites, the centenary of its birth in English.

Let me recall a few statements on which I rang changes yesterday. "Supreme Irony," say the romantics, "holds sway in the conduct of God as he shapes Men and the Life of Men. . . . In earthly art Irony means conduct like that of God: it is the Divine-Human [power] that turns the poet's creations into real Men and their behaviour into real Life." This sort of notion was echoed in 1833 by Bishop Thirlwall when he said: "The dramatic poet is the creator of a little world in which he rules with absolute sway, and [in which he] may sway the destinies of the imaginary beings by any plan that he may choose." Out of these rather cloudy figures there emerged, in the course of the last century, a more definite meaning of irony as applied to drama. In this lecture I wish to suggest, mainly by presenting a range of well-known classic examples, why this development came about.

First, I invite you to consider a notion which is inherent, I think, in the utterances of romantics like Solger and Thirlwall and which may seem scarcely less cloudy than the one presented in their metaphors. Let me call it

the notion of "general irony of drama," as more or less distinct from the "specific" dramatic form with which I am most concerned. The very theatre itself, I suggest to you, is a sort of ironic convention whereby a spectator occupying a good seat, as it were, in the real world is enabled to look into a world of illusion and so to get "a view of life from on high." And no pleasure, say Lucretius and Bacon, is comparable to that. A phrase long ago hackneyed by the text-book maker describes the stage as a room with the fourth wall down. Stale as the image seems, there may be sap in it yet. The people living in that room behave with an utter unconsciousness that anyone is spying on them. Worse than that, for them at least, the spy comes to learn and know far more about them than they ever know themselves. To wrest Henry James's much-quoted word, the spectator is being very unfairly entertained at their expense—unless, indeed, he has cause to grudge the price of admission. All this is just a frivolous way of saying that when we go to a theatre—a satisfactory theatre, that is—we go to look at an imagined life *as if* it were real; in still other words, to enjoy "dramatic illusion." By this time you must have seen another common quotation approaching: in the theatre we exercise, after Coleridge, a "willing suspension of disbelief," though it has been pointed out that there is really no disbelief to suspend when the illusion is satisfying. The peculiar pleasure of the theatre, then, is the spectacle of a life in which, it is true, we do not interfere but over which we exercise the control of knowledge. And this spectacle, when it pleases or holds us, we do not view with the "swelling or pride" of superiority but with a sort of paradoxical sympathy; for, though it is *sympathy*, it is likewise *detached*. Such a fusion of knowledge and detachment and fellow-feeling is the gift of the spectator to a play which he likes.

There can be no play without a spectator; he too is part of the performance; and we have been describing the contribution he has to make to that performance. Taking a hint from the romanticists, we have come to apply the term irony to the fusion in a spectator's mind of superior knowledge and detached sympathy. And this somewhat vague shape I shall label, for just this occasion, with the name "general dramatic irony." *The whole attitude of the interested spectator is ironic*; by the very fact that he is such a spectator, he is an ironist. And "general irony" is a name for the proper pleasure of the theatre.

Such pervasive sense of Reality controlling Appearance is not always, perhaps only very seldom, present to our consciousness. But sometimes, at the sight of certain kinds of event that happen on the stage, it emerges sharply into view, and then we experience that very thrilling effect which I shall name "*specific* dramatic irony," and which is the chief concern of this study. You will please take warning that I shall draw no real distinction as between the two labels, or only the same sort of distinction that one makes between latent and manifest. General irony is always with us in the theatre, waiting to be awakened into the vivid and active life which I should like to call the "*specific* irony of drama." Frequently, I dare say, I shall speak of the two things as if they were one—as indeed they are; and I shall use the words "general" and "*specific*" only for a convenience which I hope will be justified.

A school of definition which, as we have seen, is still orthodox among English critics, comes near to equating dramatic irony with ambiguous language.

Not even in *Richard III* [says A. C. Bradley in his essay on *Macbeth*], which in this, as in other respects, has resemblances to *Macbeth*, is there so much of irony. I do not refer to irony in the ordin-



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ary sense; to speeches, for example, where the speaker is intentionally ironical, like that of Lennox in Act III, Sc. vi. I refer to irony on the part of the author himself, to ironical juxtaposition of persons and events, and especially to the "Sophoclean irony" by which a speaker is made to use words bearing to the audience, in addition to his own meaning, a further and ominous sense, hidden from himself, and usually, from the other persons on the stage.

This "further and ominous sense" which Bradley notes in the language of tragedy is explained by A. E. Haigh. Such speech, the latter tells us, is "mostly employed when some catastrophe is about to happen, which is known and foreseen by the spectators, but concealed either from all, or from some, of the actors in the drama."

Now, in all this, Bradley and Haigh and many others with them are correct as far as they go, but they do not go far enough—as Moulton long ago implied. The inadequacy of their notion will appear, I think, if you analyse any example of what is called dramatic irony. And we shall now study four examples: two from Sophocles, one from Shakespeare, one from Ibsen.

I translate, first, a passage from Sophocles' *Electra*. Prince Orestes, secretly returned from exile to avenge his father's murder, sends his attendant to the palace to report that he is dead. His mother Clytemnestra and his sister Electra have been listening to the man's splendid lie. The queen, completely deceived by the story, makes no attempt to conceal her joy at her son's death. Fate seems to be on her side. Electra, stunned by the news, hears her mother addressing the servant:

But now, for I am freed this day from fear  
Of him and this girl here—a greater curse  
Sharing my house and ever drinking up  
My very heart's blood—now, I say, for all  
Her menaces, my days shall pass in peace.

ELECTRA:

Oh me, unhappy! Urgent the need to wail  
For you, Orestes, suffering such a fate  
And a mother's mockery too! Can this be well?

CLYTEMNESTRA:

No, not for you: 'tis well at last with him.

ELECTRA:

Hear, O Nemesis, him who lately died!

CLYTEMNESTRA:

She heard the right voice, and her act is well.

ELECTRA:

Mock on! You happen to be lucky now.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

You and Orestes—will you not silence me?

ELECTRA:

'Tis we are silenced! we cannot silence you.

CLYTEMNESTRA [turning to the servant]:

Your coming, sir, would merit great reward  
If you have stopped her tongue's unending din.

SERVANT:

Perchance I may depart, if all is well.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Not so! Haste all unworthy both of me  
And him, the kind unknown, who sent you here!  
But come within: leave her without to howl  
Woe that befalls herself and all her friends.

(*Electra*, 783-803)

Not even an alien medium can totally blur the dreadful ambiguities in almost every sentence of the original: "I am freed . . . from fear"; "I shall live in peace"; the colourless  $\omega\delta'$   $\epsilon\chi\omega\nu$  ("though this is your state") by which Electra refers to the supposed fate of her brother, and its equally colourless echo from the queen— $\kappa\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\varsigma$   $\delta'$   $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$   $\epsilon\chi\epsilon\iota$   $\kappa\alpha\lambda\acute{\omega}\varsigma$   $\epsilon\chi\epsilon\iota$  ("his state is a good state"); the grim "Nemesis has heard and has enacted well"; "Orestes and you will silence me"; and lastly, the welcome worthy of the death-messenger and of the "unknown" who sent him.

But something other than double-dealing in words gives the episode its great dramatic effectiveness; something, indeed, of which these ambiguities are merely the audible sign, and to which they owe all their power. Two opposing courses of action have converged under the spectator's eyes. Clytemnestra's will, purpose, line of action—whatever you like to call it—has long been in conflict (and still is) with the will of her vengeful son. But that any conflict exists any longer, let alone that it means her life—of this the queen is mainly ignorant. Indeed, she exults in a sense of security that she has not felt since she murdered Agamemnon. Her slayer is at hand, and she is welcoming his spy. This is the really *dramatic* ambiguity which the Greek audience certainly perceived and which the Greek dramatists delighted to embody in double-edged speech. And the ironic values of this particular scene are heightened by the fact that the spectator's knowledge is shared by a character on the stage, Orestes' representative exultantly silent.

If you listen more attentively to the *double entendre* that keeps ringing throughout the original, you will perceive that every ambiguity would suggest to an audience some new aspect of that clash of wills, one of which is ignorant. "I shall pass my days in peace"—the peace of death at Orestes' hands. "He is well as he is"—because Clytemnestra's state is ill. "Nemesis has heard whom it is right to hear"—yes, and the god's decree has doomed the queen herself. "Doubtless Orestes and you will silence me"—they *will*. The irony of the scene is rooted, not in the double meaning of the queen's words, but in her ignorance of the conflict in which she is a principal and of which the spectator is tensely aware.

I know very well that this analysis may sound worse

than trite to readers of Greek tragedy. But to show that it has not always been too obvious, let me quote from Professor J. W. Mackail:

. . . another feature in the art of Sophocles [is] that of using the same words to mean many different things. He always deals with language as something complex and organic, like life; the "little word" has many meanings. It means different things in the mouth of each one who uses it, and to the apprehension of each one who hears it. It is no mere token passed from hand to hand, but a live element, almost itself a person. This is what lies at the foundation of the celebrated Sophoclean irony. The word spoken is more than the expression of the speaker's meaning. He made it, but once made, it is a living thing, carrying in it, it may be, the issues of life and death.

Again, commenting on the scene in the *Electra* which we have just discussed, Professor Mackail wrote: "One feels as though in an electric storm, played about by a hundred lightnings. And it is all done without what is called action, by the yet more potent and yet more living energy of the word."

All of this is eloquent and almost all of it is true; but one suspects that Mackail, in his pursuit of the "little word," forgot the drama. He could not have meant, for instance, that the word is unattended, in this scene at least, by action. Unless, indeed, action means nothing more than mere physical gesture. Probably just for a moment, he forgot that Sophocles is before all else a dramatist, and that dramatic words must have *drama* behind them. Just such forgetfulness, I believe, has prevented many exponents of dramatic irony from seizing, or rather stressing, the plain fact that it is rooted in conflict of purpose, in wills ignorant of obstacles in their way.

At this point I must make it clear that I am not in any way bound to swallow whole the "conflict theory of

drama" as if it were the last or latest word. In the forty years since Ferdinand Brunetière reduced the law and gospel of the theatre to his neat formulae of conflicts—tragic, "serious," comic, farcical—we have grown suspicious of final formulae and last words about anything. I remember once being set the task of bringing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* under the yoke of Brunetière's mathematics; and producing the conclusion that Shakespeare had in mind the conflict between true love and the obstacles in its unsmooth course. And it was a proud moment when I found that two very noted scholars had apparently reached the same result in a burst of impressionism. But, with all due respect to them, the conclusion seems rather forced, in fact very funny, when you coolly consider it. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is none the less a play because it does not lie down exactly on one of Brunetière's beds. As Mr. T. S. Eliot roundly states, *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have "a pattern more complex and elaborate than any constructed by a dramatist before or since." If there be any "law of the theatre," or a more satisfactory one, it may perhaps be found in a study of dramatic illusion. I mean illusion produced by the use of a certain medium, namely, living people in action—"imitation by means of actors and not by a narrator." I wonder, by way of digging up an old bone of controversy, if *illusion* really falls too far short as a rendering of *mimesis*.

This discussion was not relevant except as a necessary disclaimer. Conflict may be inadequate as "*the law of the theatre*," but the fact remains that conflict does and must play a large part in dramatic representation. That is enough for our purpose. Irony in its general sense precedes and underlies the spectacle of conflict; specific

irony emerges sharply in the course of that spectacle and subsides into general irony when the conflict is over. Some special aspects of this proposition will be discussed in the next lecture. Meantime, with reservations, let us go on speaking of drama as conflict. I may remark in passing that William Archer's idea of drama as the art of "crisis" involves a begging of the question; for the word *crisis* takes *conflict* for granted.

We have examined a passage from Sophocles which exemplifies the "Sophoclean irony" of the "little word." But there are scenes in Greek drama that produce the same ironic effect without using ambiguous language at all. The best example is a very familiar passage in *Oedipus Rex* that is almost baldly prosaic in point of mere language but that has intense dramatic power.

King Oedipus' last hope lies in confronting an old herdsman, slave of his father Laius, with the messenger from his royal foster-parents at Corinth. But Oedipus does not know in what way, or how completely, these men hold his life in their hands: the one saved him from death when he was an infant and the other happens to be the very shepherd who then received him and took him to Corinth. The Theban herdsman shares with the audience complete knowledge of the whole tale of ancestral curse, patricide, and incest; he cannot bear even to look at the king and he refuses to recognize his old Corinthian comrade. For Oedipus' sake he is determined to say only what he must. The king speaks to him:

You were once of Laius' house?

HERDSMAN:

I was; a slave, not purchased—his from birth.

OEDIPUS:

What task your duty? What your way of life?

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HERDSMAN:

Most of my life, I followed after flocks.

OEDIPUS:

What region had you for a chief abode?

HERDSMAN [vague as possible]:

Cithaeron sometimes, or a neighbouring ground.

OEDIPUS [pointing to the Corinthian]:

Do you remember meeting this man there?

HERDSMAN [his guard beaten down for a moment]:

What doing?—Which is he of whom you speak?

OEDIPUS [impatiently]:

Him at your side! Have you dealt with him at all?

HERDSMAN:

No—but I grant my memory slow to speak.

Then the messenger breaks in; he, too, is eager to help the king, and fairly overflows with information:

It's no wonder, O King; but I will clear his memory. For I am sure he remembers when I was his comrade in the Cithaeron country, he with two flocks, I with one, for three whole half-years, from spring to fall. For the winter, I would drive my flock to my own folds, and he to those of Laius. Do I speak of what happened or no?

The old shepherd, not quick at device, is compelled to make the admission:

You speak the truth, though 'tis a long time past.

MESSANGER:

Come, tell me now, do you recall a child

You gave me then to rear as for my own?

HERDSMAN [almost at the breaking-point]:

Oh, what is this! Why do you probe that tale?

MESSANGER:

Good man, 'twas He, the King, who was that babe.

This is more than the old man can bear, and he lifts his staff to strike:

Oh, to destruction with you! Hold your peace!

(O.R., 1122-1146)

And then, too late, the messenger, stunned by the sudden outburst, comes to see that his "help" has been ruinous, and says no more; in complete innocence he has said the most and the worst he could. In the original and in its context, there is no greater dramatic irony in literature. The spectator sees three conflicting purposes in those three men: in Oedipus to know the truth which will destroy him when it is revealed; in the Corinthian to reveal it, though he would never do so if he knew; in the herdsman to conceal it with all the futile strength that is in him. Behind them, unseen save by the spectator, the power of destiny moves to bring all their purposes to defeat. All this is implied in the lines I have quoted; and there is not a single play upon words in the whole passage.

To sum up this long discussion of the two Sophoclean examples: the concept of tragic irony as a grim double-sense in language strikes not deep enough into the root of the effect. Ambiguity is only one extremely vivid way in which the effect manifests itself.

You will observe the same dramatic principles operating in the Shakespearian example which I have taken from *Othello*, though its tone and manner are very different from the tone and manner of Greek tragedy. It has a certain additional interest in this discussion of irony because it seizes the so-called drama of intrigue at one of its high points; and full-blown intrigue has sometimes been suggested (inaccurately of course: witness the *Agamemnon*) as distinguishing Elizabethan from Greek drama. The passage has never been used to illustrate irony, though it is one of the most striking examples in that kind; for mere sheer stage-craft, one would be hard pressed to find a parallel. We shall recur to it in the last lecture, for it presents the first instance of direct clash between the main opposing forces of the play.



Iago speaks. With an impeccable front of good nature he has jockeyed Michael Cassio, officer on guard, into drunkenness and riot and bloodshed. The uproar summons Othello to the battlements, and impels him to investigate. The tableau is superb: Montano lying wounded and resentful, but minding his faith as a gentleman; Cassio suddenly sobered and dumb with shame; Othello in profound disturbance and finally angry; while honest Iago, the engineer of the uproar, appears quite too distressed for words. At first he makes a sort of gesture of refusal; and then, under pressure of Montano and the general, he is at last compelled, as it were, to speak:

Touch me not so near:  
 I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth  
 Than it should do offence to Michael Cassio;  
 Yet, I persuade myself, to speak the truth  
 Shall nothing wrong him. Thus it is, general.  
 Montano and myself being in speech,  
 There comes a fellow crying out for help;  
 And Cassio following him with determined sword,  
 To execute upon him. Sir, this gentleman  
 Steps in to Cassio and entreats his pause:  
 Myself the crying fellow did pursue,  
 Lest by his clamour—as it so fell out—  
 The town might fall in fright: he, swift of foot,  
 Outran my purpose; and I return'd the rather  
 For that I heard the clink and fall of swords,  
 And Cassio high in oath; which till tonight  
 I ne'er might say before. When I came back—  
 For this was brief—I found them close together,  
 At blow and thrust; even as again they were  
 When you yourself did part them.  
 More of this matter cannot I report:  
 But men are men; the best sometimes forget:  
 Though Cassio did some little wrong to him,  
 As men in rage strike those that wish them best,  
 Yet surely Cassio, I believe, received  
 From him that fled some strange indignity,  
 Which patience could not pass.

The immediate wonder of this amazing speech is that a good deal of it is literally true, that every statement in it seems so strictly moderated and yet so transparently straightforward: no hedging, not a trace of apparent *double entendre*; a perfection of self-effacing modesty. Reading or hearing it in its context, you all at once remember that *εἰρων* (the ironical man) was a term of abuse to the Greeks, and you see why. For here is the ironist at his most despicable and most dangerous. Yet, on the surface, how perfectly Socratic in manner! If Socrates was recognized as doing this sort of thing—and in order to expose pretentious evil it is just what he did do—you do not wonder that his enemies killed him.

Now for its specific dramatic irony. Iago, so to speak, is the one complete knowledge (apart from the audience) speaking to three ignorances and fooling them all. Montano will be satisfied with the story; to him, it states the truth very moderately, too moderately in fact, but it will be sufficient to damn Cassio, his assailant. Cassio will sorrowfully admit that every word is true, that it might have been made far more damaging, but that "'tis enough, 'twill serve." Othello, too, feels understatement at work (only not as we feel it) and acts accordingly. I pointed out in the first lecture that understatement is a form of rhetorical irony; applied to this instance, it becomes a sort of fourfold Sophoclean word-play, for the understatement works one way for the audience, and in three other ways for Montano, Cassio, Othello. Further, we see here, as I have stated, the first spectacle of frontal clash between Othello and Iago, the two dominant Wills of the play—if you permit Brunetière's word. One of them is ignorant of the clash with his opponent, ignorant indeed that he has any opponent. The other is the only person behind the footlights (except the

negligible Roderigo) who knows there is a conflict, since he is its sole begetter. But the audience knows too, and sees that he is master of the situation. How carefully this last point has been prepared for, and how important it is in the play, I shall try to show in the concluding lecture.

Two other and special effects attendant upon irony are displayed in this speech. First, its irony marks a culminating point of Iago's intrigue and drives an audience back to review the long steady growth of malice, which has been unrolled, before their eyes only, from the first minutes of the play through stage after stage until it reaches this peak. And the irony of the speech likewise stings your mind forward to anticipate the temptation and the catastrophe. Reminiscence and Anticipation—these are two common functions of a great dramatic irony, at least in tragedy, and they are worth further examination.

No one, I imagine, would think of quoting these lines of Iago as an example of Shakespeare's grand style. But for dramatic complexity and effectiveness they can hardly be beaten; and their irony is the measure of their power. I am tempted at this point to discuss how irony reveals character, how it injects a grim humour into a tragic situation, how it does several other interesting things. Luckily, time will not permit; and more than enough has been said to indicate my belief that almost everything you can say about most sorts of irony will find illustration in Iago's words. Elizabethan intrigue is not competent to evolve such grand spectacles as issue from Greek myth, but it can produce effects that are just as important in the theatre.

The modern example of dramatic irony, from Ibsen's *Ghosts*, as you might expect, has been chosen because it

displays notions of force that still prevail on the tragic stage of the moment and that are likely to continue prevalent. In 1893, Brunetière spoke of those invincible powers which the Dramatic Will encountered in tragedy. To the ancient Greeks, he said, they were "the interferences of Providence," to us "the laws of nature." Both terms are conveniently vague; and the latter is now quite inadequate, though for ordinary use it might serve well enough. The forces that modern tragedy sets moving on the stage are not so likely, any longer, to be "the interferences of Providence" or mere human intrigues—common as the latter will surely continue to be—but forces more impersonal. We are already weary, it is true, of their very names: heredity, environment, superstition, complexes and inhibitions (for these too are impersonal), fascism, capitalism, and the rest. But we are now concerned only with the fact that the dramatic material of *Ghosts*, the interplay of forces that makes it into a drama, is recognizably "modern." Whether or not science, biological or otherwise, has anything to say about Ibsen's premises—all that is quite irrelevant; just as irrelevant as doubts about Greek deities or Elizabethan ghosts. The point is that the working of a certain impersonal force—call it heredity or whatever you like—took hold of Ibsen's imagination, and that he found his "objective correlative" in a certain Scandinavian household. You must endure a review of the plot, for the details of it must be fresh in mind if the great passage I shall quote is to have its immediate ironic effect.

The long first act of *Ghosts* is an exposition, carefully guarded and released, of the past out of which spirits may walk. Regina, a maid in the Alving household, talks with Engstrand, a man who calls himself her father but who

proposes to sell her to the highest bidder. Not overburdened with respect for her reputed parent, Regina rejects his proposals, but only because they are not made on behalf of a "real gentleman." She is looking for men with more *savoir vivre* than the sailors whom he proposes as dupes.

The Engstrand family is interesting to people other than themselves. Mrs. Alving discusses them with her pastor Manders, and to say the least she is not hopeful. Although Manders insists that Engstrand is the girl's father, Mrs. Alving seems not to think that Regina owes any filial duty. In fact she becomes very angry at the suggestion that the girl take any other place than one in the new memorial Alving Orphanage; but she assigns no reason for the heat.

Oswald Alving enters with his father's pipe in his mouth. Pastor Manders could have sworn that he saw "Oswald's father, large as life"; in fact the resemblance is uncanny. Mrs. Alving is not pleased at this assurance of her husband's continued life: "Oswald takes after me," she says. It appears that the youth's notions about family morality are not the pastor's: Paris and a Norway village are different places. The boy has been moving restlessly about and finally leaves the room.

The discussion of morality moves Mrs. Alving strongly, and she resolves to enlighten her pastor's mind. The whole fair appearance of the household is a mask for rotteness. With bitter intensity Mrs. Alving exposes her late lamented husband, that sainted philanthropist, as a hopeless *roué*. He had been drunken and licentious; he had seduced a servant in his own house. She had sent her son away to keep him unpolluted from contact with his

father. She has even resolved that her son "should inherit nothing whatever from his father," not even the truth about his memory. This memorial orphanage is a sheer hypocrisy.

Oswald re-enters. Dinner is ready. Regina asks for orders about the wine.

REGINA (*to OSWALD*):

Would Mr. Alving like red or white wine?

OSWALD:

Both, if you please.

REGINA:

*Bien.* Very well, sir.

(*She goes into the dining-room.*)

OSWALD:

I may as well help to uncork it.

(*He also goes into the dining-room, the door of which swings half open behind him.*)

MRS. ALVING (*who has opened the parcel*):

Yes, I thought so. Here is the Ceremonial Ode, Pastor Manders.

MANDERS (*with folded hands*):

With what countenance am I to deliver my discourse tomorrow—?

MRS. ALVING:

Oh, you will get through it somehow.

MANDERS (*softly, so as not to be heard in the dining-room*):

Yes, it would not do to provoke scandal.

MRS. ALVING (*under her breath, but firmly*):

No. But then this long, hateful comedy will be ended. From the day after tomorrow, I shall act in every way as though he who is dead had never lived in this house. There shall be no one here but my boy and his mother.

(*From the dining-room comes the noise of a chair overturned, and at the same moment is heard*)

REGINA (*sharply, but in a whisper*):

Oswald! take care! are you mad? Let me go!

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MRS. ALVING (*starts in terror*):

Ah—!

(*She stares wildly towards the half-open door. OSWALD is heard laughing and humming. A bottle is uncorked.*)

MANDERS (*agitated*):

What can be the matter? What is it, Mrs. Alving?

MRS. ALVING (*hoarsely*):

Ghosts! The couple from the conservatory—risen again!

MANDERS:

Is it possible! Regina—? Is she—?

MRS. ALVING:

Yes. Come. Not a word—

(*She seizes PASTOR MANDERS by the arm, and walks unsteadily towards the dining-room.*)

No comment on this scene is now necessary: it exhibits dramatic irony working in exactly the same way as in Greek and Elizabethan tragedy, only with a certain hard repulsive ugliness which has no poetry to relieve it. Here, as in the other cases, forces are in conflict—one of them now impersonal and deadly; and here too, just off-stage, audible not visible, there is an ignorant party to the conflict. We need not follow its course to the end of the play: one grim anticipation or reminiscence follows another, with Mrs. Alving alone sharing the spectator's appalling knowledge, Regina departing into one darkness, Oswald into another.

We shall now assemble the factors that are common to these examples and frame a working definition of dramatic irony:

1. There is in all of them something that can be called a *conflict* of forces or elements in the play: one character's force is pitted against the force of another—man or god; or a character is at variance with his circumstances; or he

is opposed by some impersonal power as of natural law; or there is some clash similar to these.

2. In all of them, one at least of the forces is *ignorant* of his situation; the situation as it *seems* to him differs from the situation as it *is*; he is ignorant that Appearance is being contradicted by Reality; he would act differently if he knew.

3. The spectator in the theatre always sees and knows both the appearance and the reality; and he senses the contradiction between what the ignorant character does and what he would do.

*Dramatic irony, in brief, is the sense of contradiction felt by spectators of a drama who see a character acting in ignorance of his condition.* This is dramatic irony in its concentrated and *specific* form: it grows, as we have seen, out of that pervasive and controlling knowledge which we have called *general* irony and which is the property peculiar and essential to the illusion of the theatre.

My belief, or perhaps my delusion, is that these conceptions are extraordinarily fruitful in the study of drama—fruitful in ways that have been neglected. And the more distinguished the drama is, the more fruitful the idea of dramatic irony becomes. From Aeschylus to Ibsen, not to come nearer, the sense of it is all-pervasive and exceedingly active. This is not to be wondered at, if, as I have suggested, irony is something fundamental in the art of the theatre; for it will then follow that dramatists who have grasped the fundamental laws of the theatre most powerfully will rouse the ironic sense into liveliest life.

I am not able now to exhibit its working in comedy. You must go to *The Clouds*, to *Phormio*, to *The Alchemist*,



to *Tartuffe*, to Sheridan; to *Tartuffe*, for my preference—if indeed you do not insist on calling it something other than comedy. There is no time to exhibit irony as a means of character revelation; but witness Malvolio, and the long line of more serious self-deceivers in Shakespeare, like Brutus and Antony. I should like to remind you, also, of Shakespeare's *ironists*—the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Prospero—shapes that are half-character, half-spectator, moving in the stage illusion with something of the sympathy and the detachment of the spectator himself. And there are the ubiquitous romantic conventions of disguise and concealment—some fifty examples of them in Shakespeare alone—all of them attended by irony and in fact existing only for some sort of ironic purpose. Two special uses of the sense I shall try to exhibit in the concluding lectures. But all these other interesting things must be left to bald enumeration.

For a few brief moments, however, I wish to speak more fully of two invariable accompaniments of dramatic irony in its tragic form (and perhaps in comedy also): Anticipation and Reminiscence.

The ironic sense drives the mind forward from the episode which is engaging its immediate attention. Greek drama had this power more abundantly than any drama of later times. For the Attic spectator came to tragedy, at least, not to hear a new story but to observe the working-out of an old one—indeed, a story that he may have seen made into a drama before. True, Aristotle compels us to apply reservations to this trite statement; but we need not pause over them now. There can be no doubt that the stories suited to the Greek theatre were not any too numerous, and that they were treated over and over

again. In the century which included the Periclean age some nine hundred separate tragedies are said to have been produced. And, so I have been told by a great authority, it was an even chance that a spectator in the Dionysiac theatre of Pericles' day had acted in a tragic chorus. One of the pleasures that such a spectator obviously had, when he went to see the *Agamemnon* or *Oedipus Rex* or the *Medea*, was the watching of dramatic action tend, mount, to an end he *knew*. Surprise, that desideratum of later periods of drama, may have been provided for him in the details of the plot but not usually in the end. What a difference is made by exchanging a spectator's foreknowledge for ignorance may be seen by a comparison of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* with the *Oedipus* plays of Corneille and of Dryden and Lee: you need never read the two latter in the way of drama, for they are regrettable performances. As for dramatized detective stories, we may leave them out of consideration. They are or may be good in their kind. But it is the merest platitude to say that it is sounder theatre to keep the spectator informed, to keep him in conscious control of what is happening, than to have him ignorant. And this platitude suggests the basis of that profound ironic sense of drama which the Greek dramatist and spectator alike must have had. Aeschylus kept driving the mind forward by ironic word-play and suggestion from the very beginning of the *Agamemnon*; the first thousand lines of *Oedipus Rex*, literally sentence by sentence, compel the spectator to compare the present with the foreordained future. And we have already heard Euripides contriving the same effect in the *Bacchae*:

Observed of all men—  
That is why I go!

You will return, borne high—  
                                   What ease you promisest  
 In your mother's hands!  
                                   To luxury you drive me!  
 What luxury!

The Elizabethans, for the most part, had to build up a story *de novo*, and so could not employ anticipation so much or so effectively. But in the history plays, and perhaps in *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, Shakespeare may have been able to take some foreknowledge for granted. For instance, in *Richard III*, he may be depending on it when he makes the doomed Hastings talk to Catesby with such swelling confidence:

HASTINGS:

But, that I'll give my voice on Richard's side,  
 To bar my master's heirs in true descent,  
 God knows I will not do it, to the death.

CATESBY:

God keep your lordship in that gracious mind!

HASTINGS:

But I shall laugh at this a twelvemonth hence  
 That they which brought me in my master's hate,  
 I live to look upon their tragedy.  
 Well, Catesby, ere a fortnight make me older,  
 I'll send some packing that yet think not on't.

CATESBY:

'Tis a vile thing to die, my gracious lord,  
 When men are unprepar'd and look not for it.

HASTINGS:

O monstrous, monstrous! and so falls it out  
 With Rivers, Vaughan, Grey; and so 'twill do  
 With some men else, that think themselves as safe  
 As thou and I.

Often, too, Shakespeare must have been considering the satisfaction of himself and his fellows and the satisfaction

of people who went to see plays a second time, when he makes characters utter those ominous forebodings which are so common in his work. In *Othello*, for example:

She has deceived her father and may thee!

My life upon her faith!

When I love thee not

Chaos is come again.

But these very fragments suggest that Shakespeare made surer ground for anticipative irony to work upon: for *Othello* is so constructed that, when these sentences are uttered, the spectator, even if he had no knowledge of the story beforehand, is hearing in them an ominous sound.

With equal haste and inadequacy we may now look at some scenes that turn an eye upon the past rather than the future. By an irony of reminiscence we are made to recall previous words and acts which are mocked by words and acts of the present. Thus, when the Jew says, "since I am a dog, beware my fangs," the spectator may hear a grim echo of Shylock's review of his borrower's "courtesies." In the temptation scene of *Othello*, Iago reaches even his limit of daring by recalling Brabantio's actual words: "She did deceive her father marrying you." In fact he oversteps the limit, for by repeating the old man's argument he goads the Moor into unexpected violence:

Ay, there's the point; as—to be bold with you—  
Not to affect many proposed matches  
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,  
Whereto we see in all things nature tends—  
Foh! one may smell in such, a will most rank,  
Foul proportions, thought unnatural,  
But pardon me— . . .

And, for a last example, the acknowledgment that Caesar's spirit has conquered, thrice repeated, recalls Cassius' sneer at "Immortal Caesar," and Brutus' original purpose which has been foiled: "O, that we then could come by Caesar's spirit." Over and over again such effects occur in Shakespeare.

But in its usual nature, this reminiscence is not "specific dramatic irony" in itself: rather, it occurs commonly and most effectively when all ignorance of conflict or situation has departed from everyone on the stage, and both actor and spectator are looking back together upon the past. Reminiscence is a necessary aftermath of specific irony; it is a resurgence of the general ironic sense. Again, as usual, we may revert to Aristotle for a statement of the *fact*. A tragic reversal of fortune, he says, brings in its train a *Recognition*, an awakening. Tomorrow, for a rather different purpose, we shall look at a supreme example of this in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*; but the inevitable awakening of any Shakespearian tragic hero or character, after the reversal, will serve just as well for illustration. The tragic victim or the tragic dupe comes to see with the spectator's eyes; and his sequent insight into the long train of past delight and of tragic error is condensed into those single flashes of recognition that only Shakespeare of all men born can put into language. It must have occurred to you that many unforgettable phrases flash a search-light into a past long since known to the spectator but now illumined in a new way from the mind of the hero himself. And how many different tones resound in the reminiscence!

Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
To tell my story.

I look down towards his feet: but that's a fable.

... of one whose hand,  
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away  
Richer than all his tribe . . . .

If you have poison for me, I will drink it.

... like an eagle in a dove-cote I  
Fluttered your Volscians in Corioli;  
Alone I did it.

By virtue of dramatic irony, immediately or generally felt, the mind of the spectator moves easily forward and backward. It gives him that sense of control which, I have said so often, is the peculiar pleasure of the stage. In the theatre we look before and after—not like Shelley with a sense of futility, but rather,

Feeling in Memory and Foresight a kind of power.



# III



IRONY as Drama-  
tic Emphasis : The  
Clytemnestra Plays





YOU have been told that the Greeks had no *word* to describe the effect or principle that we call dramatic irony. So far as I know, they never really mention the *thing*, though they must have been affected by it even more strongly than we are when we read their plays—comedies as well as tragedies, but particularly the latter. To our minds it is odd that no direct reference occurs in fifth- or fourth-century Greek literature, not even in Aristotle, to those ambiguities of language that constantly give such power to the climactic scenes of ancient tragedy. “Sophoclean irony” is a term that had to wait for the nineteenth century to coin; and it is mere luck that the epithet was not “Aeschylean” or “Euripidean”—it might have been either with about as much reason.

But very certainly indeed, the Greeks were even more keenly aware than we are of what I have called “general irony,” although they gave it no precise name. Irony is implicit in the principle of Reversal of Fortune which Aristotle notes as the basis of tragedy; its general and its specific form are both implicit in his doctrine of Recognition or Discovery. And the sense of contradiction as between appearance and reality in circumstance, the sense of mocking fate, about which I have talked so much, colours practically the whole of classic Greek literature (and much later literature) as with an Aeschylean dye—“inexhaustibly fresh.” All this has been set forth, with enviable learning and eloquence, in Professor J. A. K. Thomson’s *Irony*. Some familiar illustrations may not be amiss. The tags with which Euripides, especially, ends

his plays are a kind of witness that the *idea* of irony was a Greek commonplace:

. . . on the whole city this disaster has fallen unlooked for.

Thus ends the *Hippolytus*. Or again:

Of many things is Zeus on Olympus the distributor. Many things not looked for, the gods bring about. The things that seemed likely are not brought to pass, and for the unlikely things heaven finds a way. Such is the event that has just befallen.

This is the way in which, practically unchanged, at least five Euripidean tragedies end. I suppose the dramatist thought that, if the ending had to be platitudinous, he might as well be economical about it. But the bitterest of all tragic "last words" are spoken by Hyllus at the end of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. A layman, as he reads them, sympathizes with a well-known translator's impulse to "tone down the expressions" in order to reconcile them, as he says, "with the conventional piety sometimes attributed to Sophocles":

Lift him up, servants: grant me complete pardon for what I say, and behold the complete malice of the gods in the deeds they do—the gods who begat us and are called our fathers and yet are heedless of such suffering. The future, plainly, no one sees, but the present is painful to us and shameful to them.

It is idle to multiply examples of this oft-told tale.

And of course the Greeks were conscious, they must have been conscious, of the irony that we have defined as the specific irony of drama: the spectacle of characters acting in ignorance. But direct references to their feeling are very rare. I lift a passage from Professor Thomson's translation of a scene in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*. Dicaeopolis, who is addressing the caricature of poor Euri-

pides, has just been begging for some of the poet's "old clothes":

Euripides, since you have been so kind,  
Give me the skull-cap that goes with the slops,  
Because today I have to fool the cops,  
*Be what I am but seem another wight—*

(a line from Euripides himself)

The audience knowing who I am all right,  
But all the Chorus standing by in rows  
Like fools, for me to lead them by the nose.

Nothing could be plainer; or more indicative, I feel sure, that the effect of dramatic irony was so commonly felt as sometimes to touch the nerve of ridicule. But I do not know of any other passage where it is pointedly mentioned. The closest parallel known to me occurs in Sophocles' *Electra*, in the terrible taunt which Orestes levels at the doomed Aegisthus:

Know you not that you, a live man, have all this while  
been speaking to the dead in words like theirs?

Doubtless I have only been labouring the obvious. But the odd fact remains that there is no word used by the Greeks which in short compass denotes either the general or the specific irony which they must have known so well. Perhaps the things were quite too obvious to require a name.

When tragic irony first appeared in the English vocabulary, one hundred years ago, it was applied by Bishop Thirlwall to the general sense of irony as he found it in Sophocles who happened to be a particular interest of his. And succeeding classical editors—I do not know who—narrowed the term's application to passages which evoke this sense most strongly—namely those which, in Macbeth's phrase, palter in a double sense. Such double-

edged language—we have had it illustrated—got the name “Sophoclean irony” which in school editions of the classics it still holds. As I have said, there is no very particular reason, except the chance of Thirlwall’s special interest, why the effect should not be called Aeschylean or Euripidean. No scene even in Sophocles exhibits dramatic power such as informs the ambiguous language of the central scene in the *Agamemnon*. And the *Bacchae* and the *Electra* of Euripides show that he too is skilled at this tragic game. One observation of mine—perhaps only a fancy—is that the ironic language of Sophocles is not so much ambiguous as entirely *neutral*; it has of itself a deadly colourlessness that takes on any shade which the hearer may reflect into it; and so perhaps, just as mere language, it has a peculiar power in the theatre: τῷ γὰρ ἄν καὶ μείζονι . . . ἢ σοὶ says Oedipus to Jocasta—“to whom that is *more to me than thou* . . . ?” Into the appalling neutrality “more to me” leap the words *wife* (as he means) and *mother* (as she is). And is it sentimental of me to be strongly moved by τὸ συγγενές (“my kin”)—the name which Aegisthus gives to the dead body he has not yet seen? The word is *literally neuter*: it balances with perfect equality between Orestes who is not dead and Clytemnestra who is not alive. In spite of the implied inaccuracy we need not quarrel, therefore, with “Sophoclean irony.”

No one needs to be told how this double-edged language pervades Greek tragedy at its high points. As a character moves ignorantly to his doom—he is forever doing that—and just before the spectator hears the “cry under the rafters” which announces the end all too insistently, we hear those words that strike the one ear in one way and the other ear in another. Such speech is frequent

enough in Shakespeare too, and in modern tragedians, but it is not so pervasive. And that is why "tragic irony" so constantly suggests Greek drama. The reason usually given for its frequency, its inevitability even, in the Attic tragedians, is that the Athenian audience carried with them to the theatre a knowledge of the plots such as the Elizabethans in general did not have. True, Aristotle, writing well on in the fourth century, says that "the known plots are known only to a few and yet please all"; and it is true that Euripides commonly reviews his myth in a prologue, as if to refresh the memories of a people whose knowledge of their fathers' faith was suffering rapid decay. But it is likewise true that Aeschylus and Sophocles simply *must* have taken a spectator's foreknowledge as granted in the *Agamemnon* and *Oedipus Rex*. And it is quite obvious that dramatically ironic language and situation are part of the very bone of Greek dramatic art. General irony is inevitable in any story of reversal of fortune, and the definitely dramatic sort develops almost as inevitably in any skilful handling of the tale.

Ambiguous speech, let me repeat, is not necessary to the ironic effect, as we have already noticed in the famous scene from *Oedipus Rex*. And in another scene equally great, which I am about to recall to you, Aeschylus not only avoids double-edged words, deliberately I think, but declines to inject specific irony into a situation that would seem to cry for it, in order that a certain desired impact may strike upon his audience more heavily. But whether this is so or not, one use of irony is always the same: it *points the significance of the situation*, it brings the conflict of dramatic forces *into clearer view*, it *heightens* the sense of pity and terror.

I shall now try to exhibit this Emphasis as it is used in the *Agamemnon* and the three treatments of the same story which for convenience I have called the Clytemnestra plays: the *Choephoroi* of Aeschylus and the *Electra* of Euripides and of Sophocles. We shall see, I think, that in one case Aeschylus is making a contrast with an effect which he himself evoked in a previous scene, and that Sophocles and Euripides are striving for an effect different from their predecessor's and different from each other's. And these differences are heightened, emphasized, by a different use or application of irony. I do not know whether Sophocles' play preceded or followed that of his younger contemporary; it does not greatly matter.

All three dramatists build on the same general basis of myth. Thyestes, brother of Atreus king of Argos, committed a foul crime and endured a terrible vengeance at his brother's hands. Whereupon he invoked the curse of the gods upon his house, fled with a son Aegisthus to a far country, and was there slain. Atreus' son and successor, Agamemnon, setting out for the Trojan wars, was held at Aulis by contrary winds until he had appeased the angry gods by sacrifice of his daughter Iphigeneia. Clytemnestra his wife was left at home in Argos, filled with vengeful hate because of her daughter's death. She took as paramour her unworthy kinsman Aegisthus, likewise vengeful, sent her young son Orestes into exile, subjected another daughter Electra to humiliation, and grimly awaited Agamemnon's return. "At this point of the racial curse" begins the Oresteian trilogy of Aeschylus. Such, in dry outline, is the tale of blood that the Athenian memory must have brought to the theatre of Dionysus one spring day in the year 458 B.C.

We have now to consider one aspect and one great scene from the *Agamemnon*, the first member of the trilogy. For its structure and tone obviously determine the structure and tone of the *Choephoroi*, which is a chief concern of this lecture; and in a remoter way, but quite explicitly, it influences the dramas of Sophocles and Euripides years later. I quote gratefully from Professor Thomson's summing-up of the *Agamemnon*. What, he asks, is the method of Aeschylus in this play? "Is it not, by playing at every point, by every art, upon the contrast between the knowledge of the spectator and the ignorance of the agonists, to drive home the Irony of the situation?" The fact could not be put more truly. "It were best," I quote again, "simply to read the piece through, noting in every speech, sometimes in every line, sometimes in every word, the interchange, shadow and light, of the unknown and the known, making Irony." Indeed, a wave of ironic power is set moving in the first speech of the guard, gathers force as we watch Clytemnestra making her ominous preparations, mounts high with the pompous entrance of Agamemnon's chariot and Cassandra's, breaks terrifically in the clash between husband and wife; and then, with accelerated motion, a second wave lifts as Cassandra gathers together her divinations in the hearing of a frightened but ignorant chorus, and it too breaks with the scream of Agamemnon stricken.

You must try to pick up a hint or two of all this from some inadequate paraphrases. Note just one ironic anticipation—only one of scores—in a grimly cool image that Clytemnestra flings at the chorus early in the play:

No more I know of love or scandalous fame  
From other men than of the bronze's bath.

(*Agam.*, 811-812)



*The bronze's bath*: she keeps rolling such phrases under her tongue with a sort of secret luxury, exulting over the Chorus of Elders, whose dislike of her is uninformed and powerless, and gloating over her vision of the approaching murder. But dramatic irony alights with greatest power on the central scenes, as it should do; for them, all the anticipations have been preparing. The pomp of Agamemnon's entrance is itself movingly ironic: it is a spectacle of *hybris*, that towering self-confidence which invites the stroke of the gods. His very suspicions—for he has heard of rottenness in Argos—are ironic. He has been made half-aware, not more, of his wife's hypocrisy and of the need for surgery in the state. But *we know* that the hypocrite and the surgeon are one: *he* cannot look forward to the bath, the net, and the scarlet tempering of the axe. And so we listen ironically to his arrogant and, *as we know*, fatuous confidence:

I speak from knowledge, for right well I know—  
False glass of friendship, image of a shadow—  
Men whose goodwill to me was merely seeming. . . .  
As for the rest—the city and the gods—  
Calling a state assembly, we shall hold  
Council in full debate. And what is well,  
Our counsel must avail to make it lasting;  
Or if aught in truth have need of healing art,  
With cautery or knife and kind intent  
We will try to medicine the sore's disease.

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(838-850)

The idea tickles Clytemnestra's fancy; she plies still more of her flattering arts, and gives a new turn to the pleasant idea of surgery:

For woman reft of man  
To sit alone in the house is grievous evil:  
She hears much rancorous gossip oft repeated;  
Besides, messenger follows messenger croaking

Of dire woes to the race—each worse than the other.  
For wounds—if this man here has taken many  
As streams of fame reported to this house,  
He is pierced with holes more numerous than a net!

(861-868)

Now arrives one of the very great moments: the first wave rises to breaking-point. Clytemnestra continues; and at her command, the slaves unroll folds of Tyrian scarlet—the royal colour direfully ambiguous—to make a path for the conqueror:

And now, I pray, Beloved,  
Step from your car—but not upon the ground,  
O King, set foot of yours that trampled Troy!  
Hasten, you slaves, whose task has been appointed  
To strew the way of his going with noble cloths!  
Quick, let his path with scarlet web be strown,  
That justice lead him to a home unhopèd for!  
The issue, care not overcome by sleep  
Shall rule, since with god's help 'tis justly fated.

(905-913)

The king demurs, and the spectator almost expects for a moment that he will either refuse to risk the gods' jealousy or even stumble on the truth:

Shameful it is to stain with the stain of feet,  
Wasting our wealth, these fabrics bought with silver.

(948-949)

His pride, however, has been flattered—poor fool!—and he obeys the queen:

But since I have bowed in this to hear your will,  
I go to my halls pacing a scarlet path.

(956-957)

The speech of Clytemnestra that follows in the original has perhaps no parallel, let alone equal. She has been triumphantly successful. And her mind, filled and

heated with images of the murder that her very hands are longing to enact, almost flames into speech announcing it. Language is here strained to breaking; ironic ambiguity can yield no further dramatic value. Every image, every phrase—as the spectator knows and fairly shudders at the knowledge—is distilled hatred. The following translation of the speech is only a little more futile than all the others:

There is a sea—and who shall drain it dry?—  
 Breeding from store of scarlet a silver-precious  
 Inexhaustibly fresh dye for garment-  
 Dipping: of these the house has wealth, O King,  
 By grace of Heaven: we know not poverty.  
 And many a garment had I vowed to the trampling,  
 Had the courts of oracle made sign to one  
 Eager to compass this dear soul's return.  
 The root of the house is living, and the leafage  
 Is here to spread a shade against the Dog-star.  
 You come again to this your family's hearth—  
 A sign of warmth in winter is your coming;  
 And when Zeus fashions wine from the bitter grape,  
 Cool air quickly falls on the house, if he  
 The accomplisher devoted turn him home.

And then, as Agamemnon goes within, is released the dreadful prayer with its reverberant word-play:

Zeus, Zeus Accomplisher, complete my prayer,  
 And then let come the end thou wouldst accomplish!  
 (958-973)

I wish to centre attention particularly on the scenes in which Clytemnestra herself appears; and therefore I will not pause to speak of the Cassandra episode, although it is as relevantly and potently ironic (in a different way) as the scene we have just reviewed. Perhaps the discussion has already given at least a hint of my chief point. In the other three plays in which she is to appear,

the queen is the victim, but here she is the aggressor. The whole action of the *Agamemnon* is a record of this aggression, which is driven home everywhere by the agency we call dramatic irony. The general sense of irony, as reversal or divine jealousy, is here also; indeed it envelops the whole. But it is not uppermost in a spectator's mind. What is dominant is the continuous sense of people talking and acting in ignorance of their condition—a sense that is sharpened by the presence of Clytemnestra who, as far as the moment goes, shares our knowledge. Caught in the net of ignorance are the guard, the chorus, the herald, but most of all, the king. And the speech (or the silence) and the actions of all these people on the stage awake in us who see and hear and know, a dramatic irony that intensifies the spectacle of conflict and heightens its pity and terror. The sense of enveloping curse is here tensely focussed on the most poignant example of its working. This tensity provides cause and momentum for the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides*, which present the final crime of the long train and the allaying of the curse: the *Agamemnon* must make the sequent plays dramatically credible and necessary. And so, I say, it *must* focus attention on the conflict and its horror. The scene just quoted is the crisis: in it Aeschylus fixes our sight now on that Valkyrie of a woman and now on her victim. More than a conflict, it is a spectacle now terrible, now pitiful, according as our eye lights on the avenger or on the quarry; *and the agency by which this terror and pity are impressed upon us is dramatic irony*. All this is implied in speaking of irony as a means of "dramatic emphasis." And the extraordinary episode that follows when Cassandra intones her story of the curse and her vision of the imminent axe to a frightened but ignorant chorus—this

episode again uses irony, *but in a different way*, to enforce the same effect.

Very great as the *Agamemnon* is, it has too much overshadowed the next member of the trilogy, the *Choephoroi* or *Libation-Bearers*. The second play is less spectacular; it is not pitched in as high a key, so to speak, and its power lifts more slowly; it is so managed that all its momentum drives forward to, and falls on, a scene almost at the very end. But its structure and tone depend, I repeat, on its predecessor; and in point of architectonics, of evoking the proper tone, of fixing the emphasis aright, it is as finely wrought as the *Agamemnon*. I think I can show that Aeschylus had in mind a very definite effect, and that the apparent lessening of tension is a means to his end.

A glance at the title may give a relevant hint. The second and third parts of the trilogy are named after the chorus, not after a protagonist. This, of course, was a common practice. But it may not be too fanciful to suppose that Aeschylus might have thought of naming this play *Clytemnestra*, as a balance for *Agamemnon*. Such a title, however, would have suggested a wrong emphasis. For, although he keeps Clytemnestra's vitality undimmed to the very moment of her disappearance, he is concerned most, not with her character and fate, but with the *whole myth*. To put it another way, equally fanciful, the hero of the *Choephoroi* is the racial curse, of which a terrible special case was set forth in the *Agamemnon* but which is here brought to a final head. And the exorcizing of the curse is passed on to the Eumenides, whose shadows darken the close of the second play.

There may be nothing in that fancy, but the remarkable fact is that the *Choephoroi* is nearly bare of specific

dramatic irony, either of ambiguous speech or of bald situation. The play provides very little spectacle of ignorance in conflict with opposing force. There is really no ironic clash, or at most only a faint one, in the recognition scene before Electra finds out that the long-delayed exile Orestes is really returned. One brief intense ironic passage occurs when Clytemnestra confronts her disguised son and welcomes him, the avenger, to her house: this is sole of its kind in the play. Aegisthus is seen witlessly hurrying to death, but for hardly more than a minute. And the superb culminating scene, which I shall quote, has in it no specific dramatic irony at all. Of three notable chances to get an effect which he got so powerfully in the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus takes one but does not dwell on it, he lets another slip as if in haste, and at the third he deliberately throws away the instrument altogether.

Yet the climactic scene has its own unique dramatic power—quite unlike anything in the *Agamemnon*, or in the two later treatments of the same theme, even in Sophocles who actually attempts to parallel this very passage. It might easily have been made like the central episode of the *Agamemnon*, and a lesser genius than Aeschylus would have yielded to the obvious temptation to make it so. This time, he presents not another *ironic* conflict, but an open frontal fight between victim and avenger—eyes open, weapons bared. Clytemnestra's power is just as great as it was in the *Agamemnon*: she argues, pleads, threatens—at one point she nearly succeeds; only, it is *her* power that is now caught in the trap, as it was her husband's in the scene which the spectator too well remembers. But Aeschylus has in mind something other than to focus attention again upon a conflict between two persons, as he did for a special dramatic

purpose in the *Agamemnon*. Now, he is staging the final crime of the whole series. It is the *curse*, not its immediate exponents, that must be given prominence now. And Aeschylus does this by making both avenger and victim *conscious* that neither of them is acting as an individual, that both are puppets in the god's hands. Orestes and Clytemnestra are not deprived, indeed, of their personal quality, but they become something more than persons: they are also *personae*—masks or symbols of forces greater than themselves. Specific dramatic irony is withdrawn in order to make way, first, for a conscious debate that is great in itself, but mainly for an invasion of the *general ironic sense* without parallel in drama. The verses tell their own story; but watch in every other line those verbal strokes that call up the whole course of the myth—Reminiscence weaving the past into one web with the present.

Years have elapsed since Agamemnon's murder. But now Orestes, the long-exiled son, returns with his friend Pylades to avenge his father in obedience to Apollo's command. These two and the Princess Electra lay plans which, with the aid of servants, they successfully carry out. Aegisthus is trapped in the palace and slain. And now follows the debate between Clytemnestra and her son: the queen rushes upon the stage and takes in the whole situation at a glance.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

What is the trouble? What means this cry in the courts?

SERVANT:

The dead, I say, are killing the alive.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Woe's me! I seize the sense out of that riddle:

By craft we perish as by craft we slew.

Fetch a man-murdering axe, quick as you may—

Let us know whether we conquer or are conquered:  
To such a pass I have come of this long curse.

[Orestes enters from the palace, sword in hand; Pylades is with him.]

ORESTES:

It is *you* I seek: *he* there has had enough.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Woe's me! You are dead, Aegisthus, dear and strong!

ORESTES:

You love the man?—In the self-same tomb you will lie:  
Dead though he is, him you will never betray.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Strike not, O son! show reverence still, my child,  
To the breast on which you in your sleep have oft  
With toothless mouth sucked the life-giving milk!

ORESTES:

[Suddenly stricken with remorse, he hangs in the balance.]

Pylades, what shall I do? Revere and spare her?

PYLADES [the representative of Apollo, speaking sternly]:

What then of Loxias' orders unfulfilled,  
Pythian oracles? What of our steadfast oaths?  
Make enemies of all, but not of the gods.

ORESTES:

Your will prevails: you counsel me aright.

[He turns to Clytemnestra.]

Come: on the corpse that's yonder I would slay you!  
In life you thought him better than my father:  
Now sleep with him in death, seeing you love him—  
But him who should have had your love, you hate.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

I was your nurse: I would grow old with you.

ORESTES:

My father's murderess, would you house with me?

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Destiny, my child, in that was partial cause.

ORESTES:

And so this bloodshed too is Destiny's work.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Have you no fear of a parent's curse, my child?



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ORESTES:

Your child!—you cast me off to dire mischance!

CLYTEMNESTRA:

No, on a friendly house, rather, I cast you.

ORESTES:

Born of a free-man, doubly I was sold.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Where then is the payment I received in turn?

ORESTES [with a gesture toward the palace where Aegisthus lies]:

I blush to speak the shame in words too clear.

CLYTEMNESTRA [thinking of Aulis and Troy and Cassandra]:  
Speak in like manner of your father's sins.

ORESTES:

Sit not at home and blame the toiling husband!

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Wives grieve who are deprived of husband, child.

ORESTES:

Toil of the man supports the wives at home.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

It seems, my child, you are set to kill your mother.

ORESTES:

'Tis you yourself, not I, will do the killing.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Look you, beware your mother's hounds of vengeance!

ORESTES:

How shall I flee my father's, this undone?

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Living, I cry to a tomb it seems—in vain!

ORESTES:

My father's fate hisses command to kill.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Woe's me! this is the snake I bore and nourished.

ORESTES:

True prophet was the fear bred of your dream:

Lawless you slew; now suffer lawless death.

[Orestes drives his mother within the house at the sword's point. And now listen carefully to Pylades' comment.]

PYLADES:

Another two-edg'd woe, which I bemoan!  
But now that poor Orestes scales the wave  
Of all this blood, our choice is plain: the light  
Of the race must not go out in utter ruin.

(*Choephoroi*, 885-934)

To me at least, this scene, as I have already suggested, carries on its face two reasons why Aeschylus washed it clean of specific irony. The first is a minor matter of stagecraft: the dramatist deliberately avoids paralleling, in too mechanical a way, the ironies of the scene in the *Agamemnon*—that would be too easy, too repetitive. But the second reason is a matter of central purpose. The ironies of the *Agamemnon* focus pity and terror now on the protagonists, as we have seen, and now on Cassandra whom we did not stop to see. In the *Choephoroi* the centre of interest in the climactic episode shifts from the individuals and the situation, extraordinary as they still are, to the myth as a whole. For the scene is suspended, as it were, on a vast tide of reminiscence—it is, so Pylades says, “the topmost point of *many* murders.” What you have heard in this debate between mother and son is mainly a review of the whole story: the destiny that fixed the curse upon the house; Agamemnon’s infidelities; Clytemnestra’s guilty love; the oracle’s call for vengeance; the exile of Orestes; the imminent descent of the Furies; and over and over again the death of Agamemnon—even the axe that slew him is recalled in literal echo. And all this is clear to the consciousness not only of the audience and of Orestes, but of Clytemnestra too. The protagonists are puppets—and they *know* it—in the hands of Moira. One is the murderer’s murderess; another, the avenging matricide; Pylades, the ruthless voice of the god. Aeschy-

lus suspends the power of immediate irony which he knows so well how to use, in order to clear the way for ironic reminiscence and forecast. The spectator views not a person or force struggling blindly against an opponent; if he had been allowed to do that, the larger issues of the myth, which need emphasis here, would have been obscured. Here the eyes of both victim and avenger are only too dreadfully open; and as we gaze at them, the *general sense of irony* invades us—the sense of power brought to ruin and of divine relentlessness, the feeling of spectators who from their place of vantage may look back over the hideous myth. Pylades points the moral: the suffering of these two, he says, is indeed pitiful; but only so could *the house* have any hope of salvation. That hope is left to the *Eumenides* for fulfilment.

Of the two remaining scenes you must remember that they come from plays that were not members of a trilogy. We shall look first at the work of Euripides, because he followed most closely the main details of plot which Aeschylus used, and because also he plainly adopts one or two tricks of stage-craft from the *Agamemnon*. Unlike the *Choephoroi*, the Euripidean *Electra* dispenses with the appearance of Aegisthus. His death and the taking of his body to Electra's hut are reported by a messenger. Further, Orestes is diminished and taken out of the climactic episode. But Clytemnestra, as the murderess, is again the victim, and at the end of the play the Furies are again in the offing. Euripides takes a hint from the *Agamemnon* in making the victim—Clytemnestra this time—arrive in state, although now the stage pictures not a palace but a labourer's cottage. And he parallels the fate of the victim (as Aeschylus did *not* do in the *Choephoroi*)

by making her the sport of irony. But there end the chief likenesses to the *Oresteia* as a whole; and the divergence from the *Choephoroi* becomes even more striking.

Euripides—who “discovered woman,” so we have been told—characteristically stresses not the racial curse but the character of the two women. The “debate,” this time, is between Electra and her mother; and in the passage we shall look at, he directs our eyes for the most part to Clytemnestra herself. The queen in Aeschylus is masterful to the end. In Euripides she is still Aegisthus’ paramour; but she is singularly non-combative, she is not proud of her past deeds, and she would have peace. Our sense of fear and pity is centred in *her*; and this sense, as in the *Agamemnon*, is pointed by irony. In the *Choephoroi* Aeschylus would save the *house*; Euripides extorts our pity for the *woman*, although he reprobates her. In the trilogy, so it seems to me, the Furies make the final onset of the curse, they are its inevitable logic; in Euripides’ play they are seen approaching, but they figure, to my feeling, mainly as the avengers of a woman. Aeschylus stresses plot; Euripides, in this play at least, stresses character. We may leave it to Aristotle and Gilbert Murray to debate the comparative values of the two. But certainly there can be no doubt that the scene from the *Electra*, which has suggested the contrast I have been outlining, is wonderful stage-craft. And its points are emphasized by dramatic irony—irony in which the double-edged word is stirring.

Summoned by a false message, Clytemnestra has descended from her chariot before Electra’s hut: Orestes and the dead Aegisthus are within. Electra has cast Agamemnon’s memory in her mother’s face. Note the queen’s

mildness of spirit and Electra's personal rancour; and, note further, the myth as a whole is not much played up, so that attention fixes on the immediate present.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Girl, you are rooted still in your father's love.  
It goes that way: some like the husband's nature,  
And some, again, will love their mothers more.  
I pardon you. For, child, I am not rejoicing  
In any way too much at what I have done.  
But why so foul and slovenly to the sight—  
And you a wife late risen from bearing child?  
Alas! wretched I am in all my schemings:  
More than was need I spurred my husband's wrath!

ELECTRA:

Late comes your moaning, now you have no cure:  
My father's dead and gone. But him exiled,  
Why not summon him back—your son, the homeless?

CLYTEMNESTRA:

I am afraid: *my* life not *his* I guard.  
Wrathful he is, they say, for his father's death.

ELECTRA:

Why then do you keep your husband hot against us?

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Such is his way: you too are stubborn-natured.

ELECTRA:

I grieve, that's why. But I shall cease from wrath.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Verily, then, he shall no more oppress you.

ELECTRA:

He vaunts himself: he is biding in my house.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

You see, again you kindle strife afresh!

ELECTRA.

I say no more: I fear him—as I fear him.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Enough of this!—Child, why did you call me?

ELECTRA:

You heard, I think, that I have borne a son:  
Offer my sacrifice—I know not how—

On this the child's tenth day as is the custom:  
I, barren until now, am lacking skill.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Another's duty—hers who delivered you.

ELECTRA:

Alone I laboured, alone I bore my son.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

And is your house so very far from friends?

ELECTRA:

Poor folk no one desires to win as friends.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

I go then, at the child's appointed time  
To sacrifice to the gods: your favour rendered,  
I am off afield to where my husband honours  
The Nymphs by sacrifice.

Take the chariot, servants,  
And stall it. Soon as you think that I have well  
Discharged this sacrifice to the gods, be here.  
For I must give my husband favour too.

ELECTRA:

Enter the poverty-smitten house. But guard,  
I pray, lest the sooty walls befoul your robe:  
You will sacrifice to the gods fit sacrifice.

(*Electra*, 1102-1141)

One cannot escape the word "sacrifice" repeated in the Greek, in one form or another, over and over again. The significance of the last line needs no comment.

And now, finally, Sophocles. His myth differs from that of Aeschylus and Euripides; it is apparently taken, direct or more directly, from Homer. In this version of the story, Aegisthus is the murderer, Clytemnestra merely a willing accomplice; and that makes all the difference in the drama. Both criminals are made dupes in great ironic scenes—as is fitting, for both merit vengeance. Perhaps the Sophoclean play coming last, as it may have done, took hints from both its predecessors. In any case,

the punishment of Clytemnestra now precedes the actual murderer's; it is not developed to such length; and her death does not follow immediately upon the springing of the ironic trap in which she is caught. No vision of the Furies and no promise of their coming haunt the avengers. The curse on the house lapses, it would seem, with Aegisthus' death. Further, no sympathy is due to Clytemnestra, as in Euripides. The queen of Sophocles' play has more of the Aeschylean touch: she is defiant and triumphant. Of her exit we heard yesterday, and we saw that it is pointed by irony.

For Aegisthus is reserved the high place of evil honour, as the necessities of this plot demand. Being the chief villain he is made to run the same course of irony as Agamemnon, and then he has to engage in open-eyed conflict with Orestes, like Clytemnestra in the *Choephoroi*. Sophocles tries, in short, to get both values. Like Clytemnestra in the final scene of the *Choephoroi*, Aegisthus is given some boldness of spirit; and like her he is driven, or this time dragged, into the palace. Electra, as well as Orestes, is on the stage. From a paraphrase of the first part of the final scene you may get another dim hint of the ambiguous language which Sophocles contrived so greatly and to which he gave his name.

Aegisthus, very arrogant, comes upon the stage where Electra is waiting; Orestes is within, standing by the dead body of Clytemnestra:

ÆGISTHUS:

Which of you knows where the Phocian strangers are  
Who, rumour says, report Orestes lost  
His life mid wreckage of a chariot-course?

[turning to Electra]

You there, 'tis *you* I mean, yes *you*, of old  
Defiant! This is your near concern, I think—  
And a near concern to tell me, if you know!

ELECTRA:

I know it all: how should I not? For so  
I should be blind to what is dearest to me.

ÆGISTHUS:

Where then may the strangers be? Inform me now!

ELECTRA:

Within: they have found a gracious hostess there.

ÆGISTHUS:

He is really dead, in very truth, they say?

ELECTRA:

No, not by word alone: by visible proof.

ÆGISTHUS:

Is he near by, that I may see him plain?

ELECTRA:

Nearby indeed: a sight most sore to see.

ÆGISTHUS:

Much joy you give me—not your wont in speech.

ELECTRA:

You may rejoice, if haply this is joy.

ÆGISTHUS:

Silence, I bid you! Let the doors unfold  
For Myceneans and Argives all to see.  
If any one was buoyed with empty hopes  
Of this man heretofore, let him now behold  
The corpse, accept my curb, and not again  
Breed wit perforce under my potent scourge.

ELECTRA:

In very truth I have done. For now at last  
I have the wit to side me with the mighty.

[The doors unfold; the corpse is shrouded; Orestes, unknown  
as yet, is standing by.]

ÆGISTHUS:

O God, this sight has fallen of Heaven's envy!—  
But, lest there be a Nemesis, I unsay it.

[He gives a command to the unrecognized Orestes.]

Loose, from before my eyes, all covering:  
I too would pay my kin the due of sorrow.

ORESTES:

Lift veil yourself: not mine the task, but yours  
To gaze upon it and bespeak it fair.



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ÆGISTHUS [looking up in surprise]:

You counsel rightly: I obey. But *you*,

[addressing Electra]

If Clytemnestra's in the house, *call* her!

ORESTES:

She is beside you: no longer look elsewhere.

[The shroud is withdrawn.]

ÆGISTHUS:

Ah dreadful!

[He looks up to Orestes in terror.]

ORESTES [mockingly]:

Whom do you fear? Who is the stranger?

ÆGISTHUS:

What men are these into whose tangled snares

I have fallen helpless?

ORESTES:

Sense you not how for long

You, living, talk with the dead in their own tones?

(*Electra*, 1442-1478)

We need not review the rest of the scene, wherein the two debate with each other in complete awareness, paralleling the remarkable episode in the *Choephoroi*. It is surely clear that dramatic irony has picked out, and given prominence to, the figure of Ægisthus. As accomplice in the murder, Clytemnestra also has been given her ironic due in the earlier scene which we read yesterday; but her punishment is made less emphatic because of its minor position in the drama and the less space devoted to it. On Ægisthus the weight of vengeance must fall, and this fact position and proportion and specific irony have driven home.

I have tried to show how, in all these plays, the dramatist uses irony in its twofold form as a tool wherewith to give a sharper line to the effects he wished to produce. The *Agamemnon* may be said to give a sort of foundation

for the three other dramas. From beginning to end it is fairly alive, for reasons and with results that I have stated, with irony of the keenest and most specific dramatic kind. In the *Choephoroi* this is withdrawn to allow scope for the general underlying ironies of the whole story. Euripides and Sophocles revert to specific irony to give emphasis to those particular elements of character and plot which are of especial importance to them and which give individuality to their own treatments of the theme.



# IV

IRONY as Drama  
tic Preparation : :  
*Othello*



A NEW venture into Shakespearian criticism may be an act of courage or of mere effrontery: my proposal of today, I know only too well, runs grave risks, especially when, in Chaucerian phrase, my cunning is so weak. The discussion I shall offer is brazenly "impressionistic" at a time when, to quote a well-known scholar, "the gauntlet has been thrown squarely in the face of impressionistic criticism" by the historical method, which includes, I suppose, the bibliographical method. A learned professor of the latter school exults in the sensation—I use her own words—of "stepping on Shakespeare's very tail." I cannot claim any such intimacy of association. But I am going to try to suggest a method of dealing with *Othello*, that is impressionistic, if you like, though none the less sound if I can use it properly, and that need not be at variance with any other method historical or otherwise: it is provided by ironic insight.

Curious things certainly happen, sometimes, when such insight is lacking. Let me recall to you a page of a very learned and acute critic—Thomas Rymer, who in 1678 published *A Short View of Tragedy* which includes a rather lengthy view of *Othello*:

Othello, a Blackmoor Captain, by talking of his Prowess and Feats of War, makes Desdemona, a Senators Daughter, to be in love with him, and to be married to him without her Parents knowledge; And having preferred Cassio to be his Lieutenant, a place which his Ensign, Jago, sued for, Jago in revenge works the Moor into a Jealousy that Cassio Cuckolds him—which he effects by stealing and conveying a certain Handkerchief which had at the Wedding been by the Moor presented to his Bride. Hereupon Othello and Jago plot the Deaths of Desdemona and Cassio.

Othello Murders her, and soon after is convinced of her Innocence. And as he is about to be carried to Prison in order to be punish'd for the Murder, He kills himself.

What ever rubs or difficulty may stick on the Bark, the Moral, sure, of this Fable is very instructive.

First, This may be a caution to all Maidens of Quality how, without their Parents consent, they run away with Blackamoors....

Secondly, This may be a warning to all good Wives that they look well to their Linnen.

Thirdly, This may be a lesson to Husbands that before their Jealousie be Tragical the proofs may be Mathematical.

This is a museum piece of critical literalism; and it is literally perfect—you would not have a word of it changed. The method obviously is not impressionistic; it cannot be, for it apparently has the approval of the chief foe of impressionism and the most fashionable of contemporary critics, Mr. T. S. Eliot, who says he has never seen "a cogent refutation of Thomas Rymer's objections to *Othello*." Certainly I would not try to supply that, just as I would not supply a "cogent refutation" of the arguments of Hamlet's grave-digger. The best refutation indeed, if you really need one, is implied in the last chapter of Mr. Eliot's own latest book, where he speaks of the theatre as being the place most suitable for the presentation of poetry; and I dare say that Mr. Eliot thinks *Othello* is poetry. Rymer was not, to speak mildly, very sensitive to the art of the theatre though he knew a great deal about plays. He knew and employed a great deal of the irony of *rhétoric*, but he displays not the faintest glimmer of any feeling for the *theatre*, let alone its irony. I have put him before you because he shows what absurd things happen—for Rymer is fundamentally absurd—if you have no such feeling. It makes no matter whether you use or even know the *term* dramatic irony; it is important that

an interpreter (with due respect to Mr. Eliot's objection to that word) have the *sense*.

You may dismiss Rymer, but you cannot dismiss Professor E. E. Stoll, one of the most learned and active of living students of the drama. No one has a better right to speak of *Othello*—as he has done in two long and very influential essays, one a monograph of 1915, the other a chapter in *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare* of 1933. I cannot imagine a student of Shakespeare who is not in debt to these essays. And it is hard to imagine anyone who has not been irritated by them: I would tentatively suggest that even Professor Stoll might be none the worse for a little more of ironic insight.

There can be no doubt whatever that he has done great service to criticism, however much you may disagree with him in letter and spirit, and however irritating you find him to read. His main principles are right ones. He insists on the Aristotelian doctrine that the action of the play, certainly of the Shakespearian play, is more important than the characters; and, with this beginning, he has no difficulty in showing how untrustworthy is an enormous body of romantic criticism of Shakespeare from Coleridge and earlier down to Bradley and later. Further, he insists on a properly rigid use of the historical method: we must remember, what the romantics and impressionists will go on forgetting or neglecting, the very plain facts that *Othello* was written by a man and for an audience who lived in or about the year 1604; that the author and audience of that time were moved by beliefs and conventions which may no longer be operative. And he rightly insists, also, that "life" is one thing and "the theatre" another—that plays must be studied in the light



of the author's intended effects, not as moral or psychological documents. Much of this, as usual, is implicit in Aristotle. The points sound excessively obvious as I state them so baldly; but they suggest lessons that cannot be taught too often and that need to be taught with the authority of just such profound learning as Mr. Stoll has. This lecture makes an attempt to observe, or not to offend, the principles he sets forth.

At the same time it is impossible not to feel irritated, sometimes beyond measure, at the two essays on *Othello* just named. It is irrelevant to the occasion, I suppose, to speak of the lack of proportion in their structure, though this defect deprives the 1915 essay of much of its value. But surely one may warn readers to be on their guard against Mr. Stoll's occasional odd errors in statement about the text itself. For instance he says twice that *Othello* is "little acquainted" with Iago, when Shakespeare's text explicitly indicates the contrary. And in the rush of illustration he sometimes records "impressions" that are only impressions: as for example his continually repeated references to Iago's "obtrusive activity," implying that it is plainly visible not to spectators only but to people of the play also. This too, when he quotes as with approval Lamb's famous comment on Bensley's acting of the villain's part! Apparently the historical method was no aid here. His comments on the prevalently episodic nature of Elizabethan drama are sound, but he fails to stress properly the equally undoubted fact that at the same time Elizabethan plays *could* have excellent structure: for *Othello has*. One also feels that, like a debater, Mr. Stoll sometimes strains his useful doctrine of dramatic conventions rather unduly, in order to prove a very minor point. Did an Elizabethan audience really need,

did it really carry around in memory, a Convention of the Calumniator Credited as an aid in swallowing Iago?—is that *really* a *Convention*, or is it an *Invention* of Mr. Stoll's? As for his views of marital psychology, they faintly hint that his impressions of jealousy even in a play are to be accepted with caution. One wishes that he were less concerned with attacking impressionism and more concerned with exhibiting the true Othello; especially when, as often, his essays unwittingly remind one of the temper of Thomas Rymer—a temper destructive not only of impressionism but of the play. All these complaints involve matters of debate which cannot be settled here. I mention them as irritants, relevant to this discussion, which Socrates would have evaded (or exposed) and which even a moderately ironic sense would have been able to allay.

Since my debt to Mr. Stoll and also my irritation are responsible for this lecture, I have explained them both at length. I insist, the ironic method of experiencing *Othello* involves no contradiction of his principles and no necessary denial of any other method, except that of the Rymers, as known to me. My belief is that in the light of irony the much-debated temptation of Othello comes to appear not as hasty and unprepared but as a reversal of fortune that Aristotle himself might have found orthodox and acceptable. It has appeared so to my own experience of thirty years, which has been strengthened by contact with many persons like Professor Stoll who really know. I read the play now with the effects of dramatic irony playing all round me—more powerfully than in any other drama I have ever read, not excepting even the Greek. The results of that experience produce nothing unusual, though the precise ironic point of view is not common.

Perhaps it may throw a little light on the play itself; at least you may find it interesting, or even profitable, to take that point of view for just one occasion.

The ironic control that a spectator has over a play before him is a matter both of his superior knowledge and of his attitude of mind as evoked by this knowledge or by some other source of suggestion. In *Othello* the actual facts that are laid before him have a very great body, sufficient of itself to induce an expectation of catastrophe; and these we shall review presently. But there is something more. That body of knowledge, which might possibly be rather amorphous and inert of itself, is given shape and direction and momentum by a force within the play—namely, the mind of Iago: the most powerful mind, perhaps, to which Shakespeare gave the shape of illusion, certainly the most acute, the most agile, the most potentially analytic. The fact that Mr. Stoll is not impressed by it need not detain us, for he, too, has an argumentative axe to grind: to an audience, Iago is no doubt thoroughly evil, as the Professor points out, but evil men need not be denied brains. These two forces—the body of knowledge, and the force that directs it—are surely *meant* to produce in the spectator a certain attitude of mind towards the marriage of Othello and Desdemona. And this attitude is evoked at the very beginning to support the sense that the marriage, romantic and noble though it may be in itself, is at the very least subject to great risks. Further, it is meant to create, as the play proceeds, an expectation that a catastrophe is not only probable but inevitable. A spectator is bidden to watch the approach of disaster, to see each step leading up to it, and finally to be impatient for its coming. In other words, the temptation scene becomes literally a *scène à faire*—to use an old-fashioned

phrase—a scene that is positively demanded by the action of the play or, what is really the same thing, by the aroused expectation of the spectator.

The much-debated episode therefore becomes perfect Aristotelian: it tells of "what would happen or could happen according to likelihood or necessity." And when such an action is presented on the stage, laboratory questions about abnormal psychology become quite irrelevant. This is not "real life"; it is after all only a play, as Dr. Samuel Johnson would point out, thereby putting in one plain sentence all that whole libraries have set out to prove—or worse, have utterly neglected. For that matter, Aristotle pointed it out two thousand years ago.

Insistence upon plain common sense (such as I believe the above to be) is perhaps the chief virtue of the work of Professor Stoll. Life is one thing; drama, fiction—all art in fact—is another. The psychology of real life is one thing; the psychology, so to speak, of drama is another. True, the illusion of life that Hamlet and Othello create is so compelling that centuries of men have discussed and will go on discussing them *as if* they were "real" people of history or of Toronto streets. Quite rightly, for these fictions often do give an insight into "real" people, ourselves and others, such as no study of history or of men on the street is likely, indeed is able, to give—which is a clumsy variant of the old theme that "poetry is more philosophical than history." These platitudes are hoary, but they must not be ignored altogether. And they are quite consistent with the thesis that *Othello* builds up a calculated structure of knowledge in the mind of the spectator and creates in him likewise an attitude of mind viewing that knowledge, to the end that he not only accepts the catastrophe without any doubts

but positively demands its coming. Such is the working of dramatic psychology—and of irony. One recalls again with a sort of humour Aristotle's prosily flat-footed phrase—"according to likelihood or necessity"—with the reservation that "likelihood" and "necessity" are not the same in drama as in real life: they must be interpreted in terms of the theatre. When a spectator is led to expect an event, that event is a dramatic likelihood. When he is led to demand it, it is a dramatic necessity. Such things happen in *Othello*.

We shall review the first two acts in order to see the building-up and working of the ironic sense, and stop at the point where the temptation itself begins. Once the process has been really watched, there should be no debate about the event. All this can be done in a temper as suitable to 1604 as to 1934—without embroidery of the text or contradiction of any known tradition or convention behind the play itself. And it provides all that is really necessary in seeing what I believe Shakespeare set out to do.

For a moment, let us appeal to figures. In the first two acts of the play, *Othello* is given some 220 lines (in the edition at my hand), *Iago* some 540. I am sure that no one remembers these figures, even if he has ever counted them up, when he looks back on the play in memory. The reason is that *Othello* is given most of the *poetry* (the thing one rightly remembers) and *Iago* most of the *machinery*. There, in a word, is the dramatic conflict; and, in effect, a summary of all I have to say.

From the ironic point of view, it is not commonplace to comment on the extraordinary tact and skill of the opening scene. The naturalness of its exposition is obvious. But the salient point is that *Iago* must be presented

at once, with as much fulness and clarity as a beginning can command. He is in a sense the whole machinery of the play, *der grosse Maschinist*; his behaviour, being extraordinarily complex, might be difficult to follow, especially in the rapid movement of the theatre, and his frequent soliloquies are sign that Shakespeare recognizes the difficulty. Along with getting the action afoot, 180 lines suffice to sketch him firmly, giving hints of all that we must know: his apparent frankness, his power of mixing truth and falsehood in nicely calculated proportions, his skill in handling men and situations, his vivid reality in speech, his analytic power, his grossness. I recall this not only because these qualities provide the machinery by which the tragedy is worked, but mainly because they are going to be used to create the required attitude of mind in the spectator—a certain special ironic sense. Iago is himself an arch-ironist (as is Prospero in a different way), and he is the main creator of the ironic atmosphere. Spectators have really no need to carry into the theatre an elaborate apparatus of convention such as a scholar carries with him so easily and profitably. I respectfully doubt that they ever had any such need.

Further, the first scene puts forward at once, before the chief names are even mentioned, the name and a sketch (partly false of course) of Cassio, the main instrument of Iago's temptation. And Roderigo, the gull—a conventional gull, if you wish—is dismissed from Iago's consideration, *and from ours*, by the fact that Brabantio addresses him as an outcast. And lastly, these lines state the motive of the machinist and its cause: (1) his hatred for Othello and (2) his disappointment at being passed over. Much ink has been spilt over Iago's "motiveless malignity." This hatred and its avowed cause are, in fact,

a sufficient "beginning," according to the gospel of Aristotle: namely, something not following from anything else and from which other things follow. The initial "motivation" is quite as ample as in most tragedies—certainly in those of Euripides.

We are kept uninformed about the marriage until all this—literally all this—has been at least suggested. The first clear statement that it has occurred is made in Roderigo's speech beginning at line 120. We are not allowed to get interested in the event too early; for all that exposition and impression must precede, else we shall not have been put in the proper frame of mind. And as soon as the marriage is clearly announced, the ironic sense awakens into very lively action with Iago hidden in the darkness (or whatever was the convention for it in 1604) and uttering his villainies to Brabantio.

The first scene does still more: it introduces us to the marriage in an ugly way. Our minds are tainted with the grossness of Iago's images: "the devil will make a grand-sire of you"; "you'll have your daughter covered with a barbary horse"; "you'll have your nephews neigh to you." Revolting as these images are, they are also brilliantly witty: they stick. Such is the first unforgettable description of the marriage put into a spectator's mind; and its importance is considerable, as a foul story told about a stranger is bound to colour reception of him when you meet him. You cannot read *Othello* in the Reverend Doctor Thomas Bowdler's edition for use of the family circle; you can read, but you will not be reading *Othello*.

Far more impressive is the fact that Brabantio, though revolted by Iago's coarseness, accepts it rather as understatement of truth as soon as he realizes what has happened. The grandee's distress—one might say disintegrated

tion—is important food for the ironic sense. To his mind, the marriage is horrible—incredible even, unless witchcraft has been at work.

Your daughter

(says Roderigo, obviously saying what he thinks)

Your daughter . . .

hath made a gross revolt;

Trying her duty, beauty, wit and fortunes

In an extravagant and wheeling stranger . . .

And Brabantio echoes:

It is too true an evil: . . .

And what's to come of my despised time

Is naught but bitterness. . . .

O treason of the blood! . . .

Is there not charms

By which the property of youth and maidhood

May be abused?

After this outburst, it is plain to Iago, as he sapiently observes, that it would not be “wholesome to his place” to be produced. He has given the outburst its immediate cause and direction, and no one worth considering will ever know he did it—no one, that is, in the stage-life.

To my own experience, this is no overstatement of the first scene's effect. It is only a preliminary sketch. But it powerfully sets the current of the spectator's mind. His sense of irony, never again for any single moment quite asleep, is given a tinge that is peculiar to this play. No doubt other impacts are there also: the impact of theatrical convention, if you insist; and the general commonplace disturbance of mind, felt in this age hardly less keenly than in the past, at the thought of miscegenation. But all the impacts are of a piece. Such is the first impression you are given of the marriage; and it is hammered in.



With the body of knowledge and the cast of mind already developed, let us look at Scene ii. Note, at once, the ironic colour which the first speech takes on—Iago utters it:

Though in the trade of war I have slain men,  
Yet do I hold it very stuff o' the conscience  
To do no contriv'd murder: I lack iniquity  
Sometimes to do me service: nine or ten times  
I had thought to have yerk'd him here under the ribs.

The apparent restraint of this is even amusing, after what we have already heard out of the same mouth. It has the already familiar clarity of edge, the same bluntness: "... yerk'd him here under the ribs." But *we* see how hypocritical is the restraint and how lying the content. The deception, I say, begins at once, and it really does not need the help of a conventional Calumniator Credited. And having begun, it gathers constant power until it must issue in the temptation. We are already being prepared, by irony, for the catastrophe.

For we are already looking at Othello with the cast of eye provided. True, we see him from the beginning to be magnificent, with a magnificence that sets him off, isolates him in a sense, from everyone else in the play. His diction and idiom and rhythm really are differentiated, as you can prove by actual count and measurement:

But that I love the gentle Desdemona,  
I would not my unhoused free condition  
Put into circumscription and confine  
For the sea's worth. . . .

Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.

Iago put at least a whiff of truth—nothing more—into his own characteristic note on Othello's mode of speech:

. . . a bombast circumstance  
Horribly stuff'd with epithets of war.

Even as described in a hostile satirist's mouth, Othello has something heroic about him. But the destructive force that is to bring about reversal of his fortune has already been set in motion. The heroic forces which it destroys are morally greater; and though they are taken at a disadvantage, even then they almost carry it off. But, with our knowledge and its ironic cast, this calm confidence, this self-assurance of the Moor—"My parts, my title, and my perfect soul"—already seem to us slightly touched with Agamemnon's *hybris*, the arrogance that precedes a fall.

What a full fortune does the thick lips owe  
If he can carry't thus,

said Roderigo in the preceding scene. His phrase is ominous. The Goddess Fortuna—Shakespeare and his audience did a big trade in this "convention"—does not like too full a fortune. There is no need, however, to lean heavily upon Her. The whole situation which I have outlined is disturbing even to a "first-night" spectator if his ironic sense is alive.

The scene proceeds. We note Cassio's surprise when he hears of the marriage; and even if this is carelessly contradicted much later in the play, as some have thought, it is useful at this point. But the chief linkage with Scene i is Brabantio's passion:

O thou foul thief, where hast thou stow'd  
my daughter?

The horror of the marriage, as it seems to him, is again laid bare, at greater length, doubling the impression of Scene i: "sooty bosom," "abuser of the world," "a practiser of arts inhibited." All this to the mind of 1604 was not too far off from being "probable and palpable to thinking"; and the old man is fairly mad with fear. Othello's calm in

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the face of this passion we have already been led to expect. It is again magnificent, it wins admiration and sympathy; and the violent contrast with his opponent is, of course, a theatrical device sending expectation on eagerly to Scene iii. But in spite of admiration and sympathy, irony does not allow us to forget that Iago and Roderigo, both villains it is true, have already been heard to speak of the marriage in even grosser terms. The illusion—if you wish to use a mild word—is being built up, by the repetition, that their view of the case may be general. Any preconceptions we may have are likely to reinforce the illusion; and Othello's masterful silence allows it, for the moment, to take still stronger hold.

The long opening of the council scene, from our point of view, has one object: to enforce what we have already heard Iago say, that

the state,  
However this may gall him with some check,  
Cannot with safety cast him.

Here is a further addition to Othello's stature. Then Brabantio enters. He repeats, twice, the tale he has told twice already, with significant phrases of addition. The marriage is unnatural: it has occurred

in spite of nature,  
Of years, of country, credit, everything.

However much the duke objects to the interruption of state business, he is bound to recognize the seriousness of the charge. The first senator's speech is even more important, for it suggests the general feeling of the Senate:

But, Othello, speak:  
Did you by indirect and forced courses  
Subdue and poison this young maid's affections?

To him the horror is at least possible. Or, since Mr. Stoll objects to "horror," let us call it "uneasiness of mind."

I would not play all this up at such length, were it not that these really obvious undercurrents have been so often completely neglected by commentators who lack the ironic sense of the theatre. Their blindness has its excellent reason: the poetry and the heroic power of both *Othello* and *Desdemona* in Act I, Scene iii. For, of course, this is their scene; here the side of Iago is beaten for the moment. Shakespeare pours all his energy at its height into two speeches of *Othello* and two of *Desdemona*. The lines beginning "Her father loved me" (itself an ironic phrase) need no comment save perhaps one—that in 1604 the words must have been even more irresistible than now. Only one recorded person, I think, has ever resisted them—Thomas Rymer, though I am not quite sure of Mr. T. S. Eliot. But at the very moment the speech ends, an extraordinary irony, prepared for by a previous order, is enacted before our eyes, baldly suggested by a stage-direction: "Enter *Desdemona*, *Iago*, and attendants." Just as *Othello* has scored his great and only triumph, his sworn enemy appears as the trusted guard of his wife. There can be no more effective entrance in the range of drama.

The undercurrent—or what is at this moment the undercurrent—is still there, though the duke is won over and *Brabantio* himself is moved, as they must be, by *Othello's* poetry. Even after the side of the angels scores another triumph in the first speech of *Desdemona*, the duke tacitly admits the difficulty of the case:

Good *Brabantio*,  
Take up this mangled matter at the best.

Then Brabantio indeed yields, but without changing his mind:

I am glad at soul I have no other child.

And the extraordinary embarrassment of the episode that follows shows that the victory, though apparently decisive, has been won by a narrow margin. The duke utters a flow of platitudes—he calls them “sentences”—in heroic couplets, a form that is a sure sign of deliberate artificiality in Shakespeare’s whole body of drama whether early or late. Certainly the lines are splendid theatre here. They feed the ironic sense—feed it doubly, because all the persons on the stage have a sort of acute *half*-knowledge of their significance. (At this point not even Iago can have the complete view of a spectator.) The duke behaves like a tactful hostess when a guest precipitates a row at the dinner-table—talking rapidly and saying little and implying much. The marriage is accomplished, he seems to say, it is not a matter of witchcraft, Othello is a hero acutely needed, *but* the marriage itself is at best a “mangled matter.” Brabantio’s bitter reply points the nature of the difficulty even while dismissing it; his speech, too, is in heroic couplets, but this time they suggest eighteenth-century satire. And the flat prose of the duke that follows them signals hasty retreat from the whole ugly business. Taken as mere words, no passage in Shakespeare could seem more arid, and yet nowhere does he more completely demonstrate his mastery over style. And dramatically it is alive with ironic implications.

If for a moment we were in doubt, we are made to see at once that the trouble is indeed not ended. Brabantio, Othello, Desdemona speak, as if all together, abruptly and decisively dismissing the duke’s proposal that Desdemona remain with her father: “I’ll not have it so”;

"Nor I"; "Nor I." And Desdemona's second great speech puts the difficulty very bravely. With the utmost tact she admits the extraordinary nature of the match:

That I did love the Moor to live with him  
My downright violence and storm of fortunes  
May trumpet to the world. . . .  
I saw Othello's visage in his mind.

What knotted implications quicken in those lines! Their tacit admission falls in with the general feeling aroused by the destructive forces of the play. Then she deliberately isolates herself from her old world to accompany her husband. Her phrase is delicate:

. . . if I be left behind,  
A moth of peace . . . .

They have won their case, but for the time only, says the ironic sense; and they have won, it says also, at the price of isolating themselves from any world they can call their own. Was it by design, or by an accident of carelessness or luck, that Othello supports his wife in perhaps the heaviest and most turgid speech in the play—one in which he really achieves something like bombast? The printer, along with everyone else, found difficulty with it, for he adorned it with a famous crux. Then there follows the first direct use of the maddening "honest" as a name for Iago. Further—and here is a fine point for the actor—is it merely well-meaning social error, or is it a dash of malice, that animates the duke's farewell to Brabantio?

. . . noble signior,  
If virtue no delighted beauty lack,  
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.

Brabantio's own farewell sounds like one of the famous ironies of anticipation in Greek tragedy:

Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:  
She has deceived her father, and may thee.

Iago might have said that, whispers the ironic sense; he does say it later. The first line of the Moor's reply is composed of, first, a Sophoclean ambiguity and, second, an ironic ignorance:

My life upon her faith! Honest Iago— . . .

The sense of victory is not only dimmed, but the destructive forces are again deliberately put in the ascendant by the close of the act. It is reserved for honest Iago to comment on what we have just seen, to sum up its significance; and in doing so, he is at the moment conducting his fourth successive successful deception of another. I will quote just one passage.

It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her love to the Moor—put money in thy purse—nor he his to her: it was a violent commencement, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration;—put but money in thy purse. These Moors are changeable in their wills:—fill thy purse with money:—the food that to him now is as luscious as locusts, shall be to him shortly as bitter as coloquintida. She must change for youth: when she is sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice: she must have change, she must: therefore put money in thy purse. If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way than drowning. Make all the money thou canst: if sanctimony and a frail vow betwixt an erring barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian be not too hard for my wits and all the tribe of hell, thou shalt enjoy her; therefore make money. A pox of drowning thyself! it is clean out of the way: seek thou rather to be hanged in compassing thy joy than to be drowned and go without her.

Shakespeare put as much *energy* into that speech as into the poetry of Othello. It is meant to give, and it does give, the illusion of an appalling power. The ironic sense plainly tells us *after* this episode, as it has suggested *before*, that the conflicting forces in this play are evenly

matched. But Iago has the advantage of working under cover, as only the ironic spectator knows; for Roderigo has been washed off the slate of consideration. Further, this speech and the whole episode of which it is part recall, by virtue of irony, and re-establish in the mind more firmly than ever, our original uneasiness about the marriage of Othello and Desdemona. True, this trouble is not the same as it was. Along with the gross images which Iago has kept and will keep pouring into the mind, there is lodged in us the image of a union daring and romantically beautiful; we no longer think of it, if ever we were inclined to do so, as horrible in itself. But it is coming to appear something far more than dangerous in this dramatic world now before us. Iago's words and cast of mind are indeed ugly and false; but the falsehood has in it a real grain of truth that is denied by no one in the stage-life. Iago merely says more grossly what Brabantio had said: "in spite of nature, Of years, of country, credit, everything." The dramatist, by exciting in us the ironic spirit, has already induced us to expect as probable some sort of reversal for this toppling fortune, and he has almost got us ready to accept as plausible any excuse for disaster. The machinery that supplies the excuse began building at the fourth line of the play, and at the end of Act I it is complete: a power that is very great, completely concealed, and that has already won its way into trust. But the spectator *knows*; and his irony controlling all the knowledge is now being bent toward the catastrophe. This is not life; it is the illusion of the theatre. As I have said, I speak only of my own experience; but the illusion created in *Othello* by the end of the first act is to me irresistible; and it is an illusion which, *in the theatre*, whether of fact or imagination, survives all analysis. Let us take



along one point only out of Iago's soliloquy at the end of the act: "Cassio's a proper man." There's the excuse for which the spectator has been waiting.

The second act is even more important for our purposes than the first, as it ought to be. A hint of its ironic importance lies again in figures: Othello is given some 80 lines in this act, Iago some 320. I will forbear, however, to burden you with such wearisome weight of detail as you have just borne. I will try to summarize the ironies that play around literally every line, almost, and that rapidly gather strength in their onset toward the temptation.

Note, first, how Cassio is picked out and shaped as a means toward the end. A text for the lesson is in the words just quoted: "Cassio's a proper man." We watch him gaining body, from our vantage point of knowledge, and Iago is watching him also and giving significance to what we see. We heard of him in the first lines of the play, and we have seen him once or twice on the stage. The style of his first notable speeches in the second act is significant: along with everything else we learn about him, it suggests "the wealthy curled darlings of our nation" whom Desdemona rejected for the Moor. Listen to him:

*He hath achieved a maid  
That paragon's description and wild fame;  
One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,  
And in the essential vesture of creation  
Does tire the ingener.*

These and the lines following are distinct from any other lines in the play. They suggest the language of the sonnets of the 1590's—the language of the romantic lover and the elegant young blade as conceived by the Elizabethans; you get the same general effect from the Romeo of the first act; and you have it carried to absurdity in

Osric the water-fly. I do not mean to say that Cassio is nothing else. But here is a place where we may remember our conventions profitably. Iago silently watches—and we are made to watch—the elegant courtesy of his greeting to Desdemona: “Ay, smile upon her, do; I will gyve thee in thine own courtship. . . . Very good; well kissed! an excellent courtesy! . . . Yet again your fingers to your lips? Would they were clyster-pipes for your sake.”

There is something indefinable—but it is certainly ironic—in what immediately follows: “(*Trumpet within.*) The Moor! I know his trumpet.” Othello appears and in the ecstasy of reunion utters—one almost says chants—lines that to the audience have an Aeschylean foreboding:

. . . not another comfort like to this  
Succeeds in unknown fate. . . .

It stops me here: it is too much of joy.

Note how extraordinarily brief this episode is! Then, with the visible contrast between Cassio and the Moor fresh to the memory, we are quickly led back with Iago to the old theme now given exact and specific point: “. . . there should be . . . to give satiety a fresh appetite, loveliness in favour, sympathy in years, manners, and beauties: all which the Moor is defective in”; while as for Cassio—“. . . the knave is handsome, young, and hath all those requisites in him that folly and green minds look after: a pestilent complete knave; and the woman hath found him already.” The case that Iago makes is abominable; but, in spite of that, he makes it sound nearly as “probable and palpable to thinking” as it had been to Brabantio. Besides—and this is the really important thing—we are in the theatre, and we can already see Iago’s bad case being made good: “Villainous thoughts, Roderigo,

... marshal the way." The ironic sense watches Cassio with a sort of pity; we *see* him being deliberately shaped as a tool proper to Iago's hand; and there is a beginning of terror as it watches, and thinks of, the Moor and his wife.

Turn back, now, for a moment to where Desdemona is anxiously awaiting the arrival of her husband. The episode is, or used to be, difficult for the "unco guid," as being too coarse for what ought to be Desdemona's taste. One is reminded of the New England editor who thought Shakespeare killed off Mercutio so that Romeo would not have to introduce him to Juliet. Luckily tastes differ and change. It is not very disturbing morally that Desdemona should egg Iago on to his doggerel about the ways of women; but it is dramatically disturbing that she should turn to him for diversion. The elegant Cassio is a bit uncomfortable, but only about Iago's etiquette: "You may relish him more in the soldier than in the scholar." The notable and ominous thing about the business is its naturalness, its good nature even. For it amuses Iago to amuse people, especially pretty women. With great and willing tact he relieves the tensivity of the moment; he is a nice judge of person and occasion. The irony is that we know the mild ribaldry of his jokes to be but a pale reflection of his opinions; and, much more important, that the bodyguard whom Othello trusted in Venice has won the complete confidence of Desdemona. He has fooled her, as he has fooled Roderigo, Brabantio, the Moor, and as he will fool Cassio presently. Everybody on the stage, so we see, has every reason to trust him implicitly—every reason, that is, *except the knowledge which only the spectator has*.

Indeed, we are given so much of it that it has sometimes proved hard for three centuries of men to keep the two Iagos in watertight compartments: surely, so spectators are tempted to feel, the people of Venice and Cyprus *must* also see something of what *they* see. Mr. Stoll relates an old tale that points the difficulty: a cry from the gallery—"you big black fool, can't you *see*?" This only proves that irony is doing its work altogether too well; and herein, perhaps, lies the real defect of the play. But it is not impossible to be under the spell of irony and to keep controlled and intelligent at one and the same time. The "convention" which helps to make Iago's success acceptable must be inadequately named, as far as *Othello* is concerned: Iago is not merely the "Calumniator Credited" but the "Calumniator Who Cannot be Distrusted."

Here we may digress to have a word about how Iago should be acted; and this is my last bow to Professor Stoll. In 1933 as in 1915, Mr. Stoll lays stress on Iago's "obtrusive activity" as something that "might well have been suspected," and on his "shrugs, suggestions, and glittering eye" (the Wedding Guest as impressionist critic!). Or, further, he describes the Ancient as "an outwardly coarse and cynical . . . subaltern." And in an extraordinary passage of *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare*—a passage which Mr. Stoll evidently admires, since most of its phraseology appeared in the monograph of 1915—he speaks of

the highly suspicious activity of the intermediary—his echoes and shrugs, questions and misgivings, feints and dodges, pretences and denials, and whisking of evidence under the person's nose and sticking it in his pocket. An honest man who undertakes

to tell you that your son—or that your wife, along with your dearest friend—has played you false, makes a clean breast of it, I suppose, without flourish or ado; and does not twist and turn, tease and tantalize, furtively cast forth the slime of slander and ostentatiously lick it up again.

How does Mr. Stoll know, from text or convention or historical method, that Shakespeare intended Iago to be acted as this passage plainly implies? As a matter of fact, he practically admits that he does not know. For later—many pages later—in the 1933 essay, he describes Iago's "habitual bearing" as that of "a frank, blunt, friendly, and none too godly man of the world. He does not, in the circumstances of the fiction, overdo." Perhaps these two apparently contradictory views can be harmonized, but it does not look easy. I have a suspicion that even Mr. Stoll—like the owner of that voice in the gallery—falls, on occasion, into the unsophisticated predicament. And my further feeling is that some time between 1915 and 1933 he saw that he had forgotten a classic note, by Charles Lamb, on Bensley's acting of Iago. I quote it from Mr. Stoll's page:

His Iago was the only endurable one which I remember to have seen. No spectator from his action could divine more of his artifice than Othello was supposed to do. His confessions in soliloquy alone put you in possession of the mystery. There were no by-intimations . . . not a man setting his wits at a child, and winking all the while at other children who are mightily pleased at being let into the secret; but a consummate villain entrapping a noble nature into toils, against which no discernment was available, where the manner was as fathomless as the purpose seemed dark and without motive.

I hardly need say that this is the interpretation of Iago's manner on which I depend.

To return to the text. Throughout Act II the ironic sense is powerfully developed and quickened by six further revelations of Iago's private mind at work in soliloquies, asides, and talks with Roderigo. The spec-

tator sees Desdemona under the spell, Othello still blindly confident, Cassio duped and disgraced and thanking his destroyer for the service. And along with all that, he watches Iago's plan for the temptation grow rapidly, but stage by stage, from the germ. First, there is "Cassio's a proper man"; then a double addition to that, suggested by the spectacle of Cassio's courtesy, in the scheme for supplanting him and in the first outline of the temptation itself; next, the triumph over Cassio and the consequent possibility, already amply prepared for, of compromising Desdemona; and finally, the fully shaped design. This sense of progress is all-important and all-powerful in the theatre. We are walking with our eyes open to the fatal event; but our eyes *are* open. We have already got beyond need of "psychological" justification or likelihood; in fact, in the theatre, we never have any such scientific need. And in the theatre, a chain of visible acts prepares far more competently for reversal of fortune than any amount of thick-piled convention. It is the preparation proper to a play; and, in this play at least, the chain is visible to the eye of irony alone.

One last complicated irony remains, and I have done: the episode of Cassio's fall. We need not follow Iago's manoeuvres preceding this event: they are as simple and natural in appearance as was the relieving of Desdemona's anxiety. Iago's activity is indeed obtrusive, but never for one moment seeming so to anybody on the stage; he looks like "a frank, blunt, friendly, and none too godly man of the world." Cassio is brought, as of his own motion, to disobey orders, get drunk and disorderly, wound Montano, and rouse the town and the general; even Desdemona appears later to give edge to the spectator's irony. There is grouped on the stage that effective tableau which we studied two days ago: Othello, Mon-

tano, Cassio, Iago—all in different attitudes and thinking very diverse thoughts. I must quote again the amazing speech that we have already discussed at length. For sheer skill of workmanship, I repeat, there is nothing even in Shakespeare to surpass it:

Touch me not so near:  
 I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth  
 Than it should do offence to Michael Cassio;  
 Yet, I persuade myself, to speak the truth  
 Shall nothing wrong him. Thus it is, general.  
 Montano and myself being in speech,  
 There comes a fellow crying out for help;  
 And Cassio following him with determined sword,  
 To execute upon him. Sir, this gentleman  
 Steps in to Cassio and entreats his pause:  
 Myself the crying fellow did pursue,  
 Lest by his clamour—as it so fell out—  
 The town might fall in fright: he, swift of foot,  
 Outran my purpose; and I return'd the rather  
 For that I heard the clink and fall of swords,  
 And Cassio high in oath; which till tonight  
 I ne'er might say before. When I came back—  
 For this was brief—I found them close together,  
 At blow and thrust; even as again they were  
 When you yourself did part them.  
 More of this matter cannot I report:  
 But men are men; the best sometimes forget:  
 Though Cassio did some little wrong to him,  
 As men in rage strike those that wish them best,  
 Yet surely Cassio, I believe, received  
 From him that fled some strange indignity,  
 Which patience could not pass.

This speech is, of course, *of course*, one long lie. But, says the spectator, Who but me could help believing it? It merits, so it positively appears, and *gets*, word by word, the unshadowed assent of Montano, Othello, Cassio himself—all with different reasons. Even Roderigo, if he could be recalled and make a fifth in the tableau, could

pick flaws only in minor and unessential detail, though like us he might have something to say about the premises of the argument. In the stage-life before us, what, we ask, can possibly disrupt this web of trust? But, really, comment is here more of a nuisance than usual. Passing over the succeeding conversation between Iago and Cassio that fortifies the deception at a most vital point, I garble the last sentence of Iago's soliloquy:

So will I . . . make the net  
That shall enmesh them all.

Clytemnestra too used such words, looking at Agamemnon, and through him, to the bath, the snare for the feet, and the tempering of the axe: "He is as full of holes as is a net."

We are at long last done with this study of preparation for the tempting of Othello. I have tried to show how, to my experience at least, this preparation is made by the working of irony proper to drama. I have actually seen the play only once, very long ago, badly done. But to my imaginative experience—such as I can muster—the preparation seems utterly cogent. When Iago says at Act III, Scene iii, line 34, "Ha! I like not that," I say to myself, "This is what I have been waiting for: it has fallen at last." And if you ask me *why* it seems cogent, I can only say that in the theatre, the imaginative theatre as well as the actual, it is not a train of argument or a body of convention that makes an event credible, but an attitude of mind induced one way or another in the spectator by a train of actions pointing toward and leading up to that event. In Othello, certainly, this attitude is ironic; and by virtue of irony we look upon the train of events as we do look upon them. We see things tending inevitably—so it seems to us



—in one direction, though that direction is hidden from the Moor and the gentle Desdemona. And when the way which we have followed, with our superior knowledge, step by step, ends in just such a tragic reversal as we have been led to expect, how *can* we be surprised or incredulous? As a matter of fact, no one really is surprised at the rapidity of the temptation in *Othello* except the Thomas Rymers, who think in ill-aired studies and not in or of the theatre. It is all a matter of illusion, not of logical process. And dramatic irony is the sense of an illusion under control of knowledge but beyond control of interference. The spectator sees Appearance and Reality as one whole and yet in conflict:

Methinks I see these things with parted eye,  
When every thing seems double. . . .

Are you sure  
That we are awake? It seems to me  
That yet we sleep, we dream.

If you *are* awake and wish to know Bottom the Weaver's idea of illusion, go to the text that I have kindly (and courageously) indicated just now; perhaps you will think that he takes the proper view of the whole matter.

# Notes



The material of the first two lectures is taken largely from an unpublished dissertation in the Harvard College Library, "Dramatic Irony: Studies in Its History, Its Definition, and Its Use Especially in Shakespere and Sophocles," 1913; and from an essay in the *University Magazine*, Montreal, vol. XII (1913), pp. 116-34.

# I

- page 3, l. 9. Chevalier: *The Ironic Temper* (New York, 1932), pp. 11-12, 220. This interesting book has a valuable bibliographical note on the "History of the Evolution of Irony."
- page 4, l. 15. Ribbeck: "Ueber den Begriff des εἰρων," *Rheinisches Museum*, vol. XXI, pp. 381 ff. This is the classical study of *eironeia* in Greek literature of the fifth and fourth centuries.
- page 5, l. 5. "Hellenistic rhetoricians": the definition is from Tiberius Rhetor, date uncertain. Walz, *Rhetores Graeci*, vol. VII, p. 531.
- page 5, l. 8. Cicero: phrase adapted from *De oratore* II. 269 and *Academica* II. 15.
- page 5, l. 14. Quintilian: *Institutes* VIII. vi. 54.
- page 5, l. 20. Puttenham: *The Art of English Poesie*, Book III, chap. xviii.
- page 5, l. 22. Thirlwall: "On the Irony of Sophocles," published first in the *Philological Museum*, vol. II (1833); republished in *Essays and Remains etc.*, ed. Perowne (1878). To this famous essay frequent reference is made in these lectures.
- page 6, l. 7. "before Aristotle": there is a definition of rhetorical irony sometimes attributed to Anaximenes of Lampsacus, a contemporary of Aristotle. See *Rhet. ad Alex.*, 1434a. And, of course, Aristotle himself speaks of "irony" in a way that indicates it was already familiar to writers on rhetoric as a device of style. He himself guardedly recommends it for certain rhetorical purposes, though always, I think, with an eye on its original sense and its unpleasant connotations. See the *Rhetoric* II. ii. 24 (1379b); II. v. 11 (1382b); III. vii. 11 (1408b); III. xviii. 7 (1479b); III. xix. 5 (1420a).
- page 6, l. 28. Archer: see his edition of Ibsen (New York, 1907), vol. VIII, pp. xxi ff.
- page 7, l. 2. Skeat: later editions of Skeat's dictionary give the now commonly accepted etymology.

- page 7, l. 4. *Century etc.*: the words "or more" are interesting in that they suggest an ancient confusion between the two pretenders, *eiron* and *alazon*.
- page 7, l. 11. Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* II. vii. 12 (1108a). See also IV. iii. 28 (1124b); IV. vii. 2; IV. vii. 14 (1127ab).
- page 10, l. 8. Quintilian: IX. ii. 44-6. He has been distinguishing between irony as *schema* and irony as *tropos*. See also IV. i. 39, 70; VI. ii. 15; VI. iii. 68, 91; IX. i. 3-9; especially, IX. ii. 44-53; IX. ii. 97; IX. iii. 29.
- page 10, l. 32. "modern Romantic": R. S. Bourne in *Atlantic Monthly*, Feb., 1913.
- page 11, l. 7. Thrasymachus: *Republic*, 337a: αὐτὴν κελνὴν ἢ ἐλωθὺν ἐλπωρὰν Σωκράτους.
- page 11, l. 16. Aristophanes: *Clouds*, 449; *Birds*, 1211; *Wasps*, 174. In these and all other references to Greek in these lectures, it may be a derivative or a compound of ἐλπών that is referred to.
- page 11, l. 17. Plato: *Apology*, 37e; *Amatores*, 133d; *Symposium*, 216e, 218d; *Sophist*, 237ac, 268bc; *Euthydemus*, 302b; *Cratylus*, 384ab; *Gorgias*, 489e; *Laws*, 908e.
- page 11, l. 18. Theophrastus: see the portrait of the ἐλπών in his *Characters*.
- page 11, l. 20. Lucian: *Prometheus es in verbis*, 24; *Vera historia*, 115; *De domo*, 192; *Lexiphanes*, 317; *Demonax*, 378; *Dialogi mortuorum*, 419; *Piscator*, 592; *Jupiter Tragoedus*, 700; *Anarcharsis*, 897.
- page 11, l. 20. Plutarch: *Moralia*, 44d, 199ef, 236c, 618e, 999d. *Vitae*, 180. 11; 243. 15; 419. 24; 509. 27; 635. 30; 803. 19; 896. 18; 1019. 17.
- page 12, l. 10. "as indeed Socrates did": *Nicomachean Ethics* IV. vii. 14 f.
- page 12, l. 12. Cicero: *De oratore* II. 67, 269-70. See also *Brutus*, 299: "I should like to be thought an ἐλπών."

The discussion of Socratic irony that follows at this point in the lecture is a debasement of the classic article, "Socrate," by G. Rodier in *La Grande Encyclopédie*.

- page 13, l. 33. Lucretius and Bacon: *De rerum natura* II. 1-10 as paraphrased by Bacon in the essay "Of Truth."
- page 14, l. 19. Friedrich Schlegel: *Lyceumsfragment* 108; see also *Athendum* (Berlin, 1800), part III, p. 344. The passage may be consulted most conveniently in J. Minor, *Friedrich*

- Schlegel, seine prosaischen Jugendschriften* (Wien, 1882), vol. II, pp. 198, 391.
- page 15, l. 19. *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Boston and New York, 1919); see chap. VII.
- page 15, l. 25. "dramatic irony": see "Ueber die Unverständlichkeit," the final essay in the *Athenaum*, which parades all the ironies (Minor, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 392).
- page 15, l. 30. "transzendente Buffonerie": *Lyceumsfragment* 42 (Minor, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 189)—an important utterance.
- page 15, l. 33. "joy . . . symbols": the two phrases are taken from R. M. Wernae, *Romanticism and the Romantic School in Germany* (New York, 1910), p. 206. See the whole of chap. x in this book. Other references immediately accessible to me are: Rudolf Haym, *Die romantische Schule* (Berlin, 1920), pp. 295 ff.; Ricarda Huch, *Die Romantik* (Leipzig, 1920), vol. I, pp. 276-93; Friedrich Gundolf, *Romantiker* (Berlin, 1930), pp. 94 ff., and all of the essay on F. Schlegel.
- page 16, l. 6. "free and unfettered": Oskar Walzel, *Deutsche Romantik* (Leipzig, 1923); p. 30.
- page 16, l. 7. Goethe: (i) *Spanische Romanzen in Schriften zur Literatur* II, Jubiläums Ausgabe, vol. XXXVII, p. 259. (ii) *Zur Farbenlehre*, vol. XL, pp. 266-7; cf. p. 63.
- See also *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, vol. XXIII, pp. 258-9; and *West-östlicher Divan*, vol. V, pp. 195-6.
- pages 16, 17. Tieck and Solger: I owe the quotations from Tieck to Josef Budde, *Zur romantischen Ironie bei Ludwig Tieck* (Bonn, 1907), pp. 18-19, 23. The latest and most complete treatment of this subject is A. E. Lussky, *Tieck's Romantic Irony* (University of North Carolina Press, 1932). Budde's essay points out Solger's influence on Tieck, which is fully discussed in Percy Matenko, *Tieck and Solger* (New York and Berlin, 1933). The quotation from Solger is to be found in *Erwin* (Berlin, 1815), vol. II, pp. 286-7, and should be read in its context, pp. 278-87. The "summary" is taken from Budde, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
- page 18, l. 8. Schlegel on "Socratic irony": see Minor, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 239.
- page 18, l. 15. "So also the spirit": *Erwin*, vol. II, p. 277.
- page 19. Thirlwall and Tieck: Thirlwall translated two of Tieck's stories, and wrote an introduction for them. This I have not seen. E. H. Zeydel, in *Ludwig Tieck and England* (Prince-

- ton University Press, 1931), p. 147, says that Thirlwall described "Tieck's literary efforts" as being "chiefly of an ironical nature."
- page 20, l. 8. Thomson: *Irony: An Historical Introduction* (London, 1926).
- page 20, l. 9. the Goddess Fortuna: see H. R. Patch's book of that name (Harvard University Press, 1927).
- page 21, l. 7. "Greek rhetorician": Nicephorus, of the twelfth century. See Walz, *Rhetores Graeci*, vol. I, p. 487.
- page 21, l. 11. N.E.D.: the misinterpreted passage is in *Trinarchodia: The Raigne of Henrie the Fifth*, stanza 198; see Grosart's edition of the poems of George Daniel (1878), vol. IV, p. 155.
- page 23, l. 5. Campbell: see the essay in his edition of Sophocles (Oxford, 1871), vol. I, pp. 112 ff.; *A Guide to Greek Tragedy* (London, 1891), pp. 213 ff.; and *Tragic Drama in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Shakespeare* (London, 1904), p. 170.
- page 25, l. 14. Moulton: *The Moral System of Shakespeare* (London, 1903), pp. 209-10. Relevant discussions are to be found in his *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (Oxford, 1906), and *The Ancient Classical Drama* (Oxford, 1890).
- page 26, l. 19. Socrates: *Symposium*, 223b-d.
- page 26, l. 31. Demosthenes: *Philippics* I. vii. 37.
- page 27, l. 3. Dickinson: quoted from J. M. Keynes, *Essays in Biography* (London, 1933), p. 303.

## II

- page 33, l. 32. Bradley: *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London, 1929), pp. 338-9.
- page 34, l. 9. Haigh: *The Tragic Drama of the Greeks* (Oxford, 1896), p. 174.
- page 37, l. 3. Mackail: *Lectures on Greek Poetry* (London, 1912), pp. 152-3.
- page 38, l. 2. Brunetière: see "La loi du théâtre" in *Annales du théâtre* (1893), pp. viii ff.; *Conférences de l'Odéon*, p. 364.
- page 38, l. 17. Eliot: *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London, 1933), p. 43.
- page 39, l. 6. Archer: *Play-Making: A Manual of Craftsmanship* (London, 1912), p. 32.
- page 44, l. 33. *Ghosts*: the excerpt is in Archer's translation.

## III

"Irony as Emphasis": one of my students, Mr. Laurie Todd, has called my attention to an article by S. K. Johnson, "Some Aspects of Dramatic Irony in Sophoclean Tragedy" (*Classical Review*, vol. XLII, pp. 209-14), in which this topic is discussed from what is, I think, a quite different angle.

page 60, l. 32. *Acharnians*: see *Irony: An Historical Introduction*, p. 24.

page 63, l. 9. "known plots etc.": *Poetics*, 1451b. Professor O. J. Todd points out to me that a completely contradictory view is expressed by Aristotle's contemporary, Antiphanes. See Kock, *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, vol. II, p. 90, fragment 191.

page 65, l. 7. "Thomson's summing-up": see *Irony: An Historical Introduction*, pp. 39, 53.

page 68, l. 23. "accomplisher devoted": a vain attempt to render *τελειου*, which is a term sometimes used by Homer to describe a perfect and appointed victim of sacrifice: a pungently characteristic word-play. For the suggestion I am again indebted to Professor Todd.

page 74, l. 31. "hisses command": reading *συπλῖξει*—an emendation, I think, by Verrall.

page 82, l. 18. "you, living": reading *ζῶν τοῖς θάνουσι*.

## IV

page 87, l. 20. Rymer: quoted from Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1908), vol. II, pp. 220-1.

page 88, l. 18. "cogent refutation": Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (New York, 1930), p. 96 n.

page 88, l. 23. "Eliot's own latest book": *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 153.

page 89, l. 4. Stoll: this lecture makes constant reference to *Othello: An Historical and Comparative Study* (University of Minnesota, 1915); and to the essay on *Othello* in *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare: A Study in Dramatic Contrast and Illusion* (New York, 1933).

page 109, l. 24. "extraordinary passage": see *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare*, p. 9; and see, also, the monograph of 1915, p. 21.

page 110, l. 20. Lamb: see *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare*, p. 39.





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